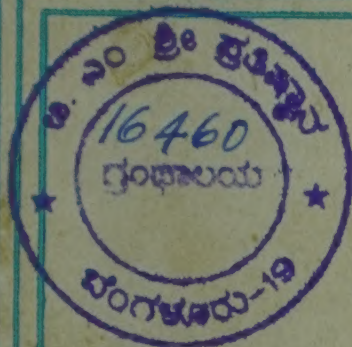




BHAVAN'S BOOK UNIVERSITY

**MAHAYOGI
SRI AUROBINDO**

R. R. Diwakar

GENERAL EDITORS

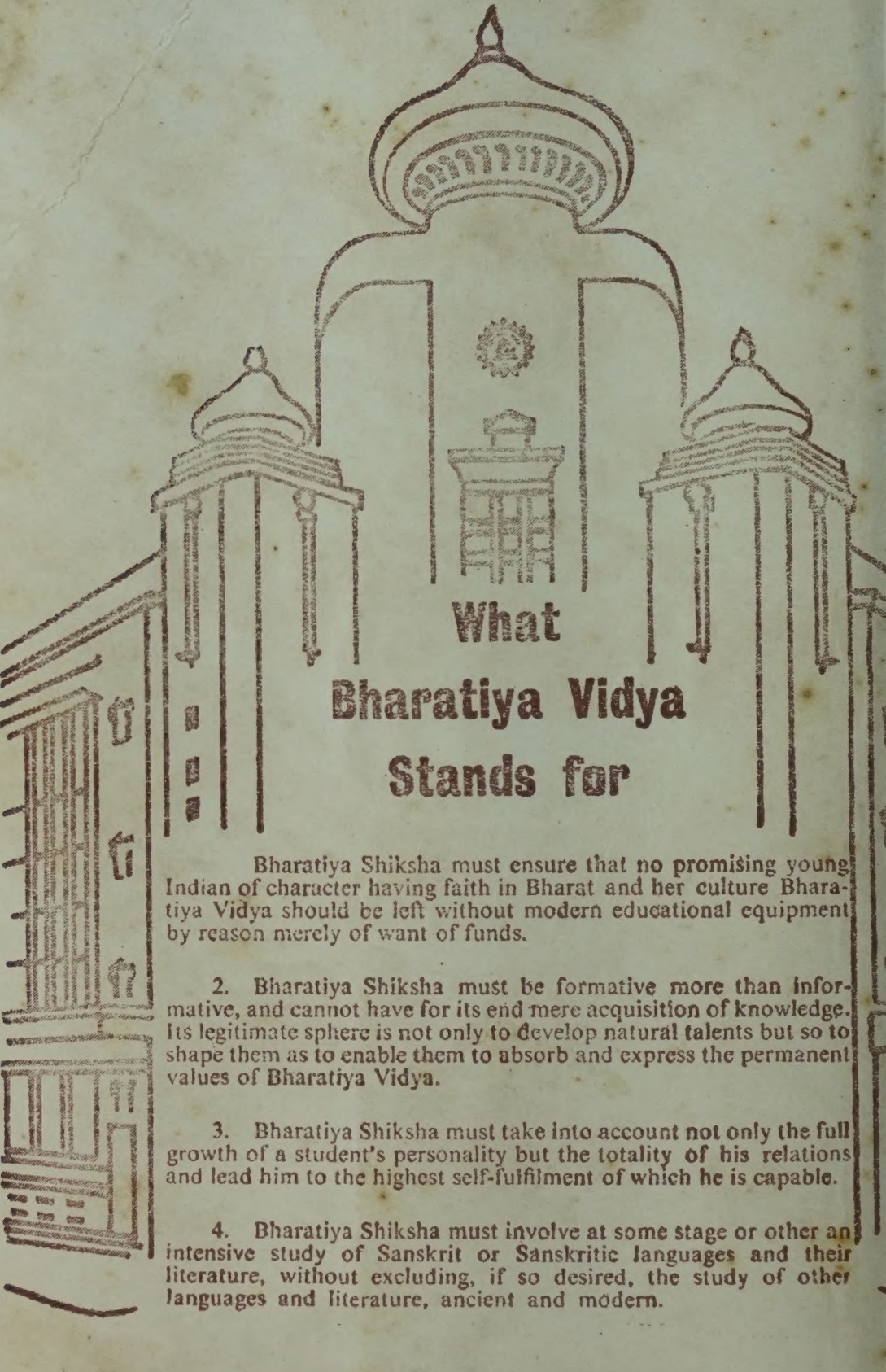
M. MUNSHI

R. DIWAKAR

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ARAD



BHARATIYA VIDYA BHAVAN, BOMBAY



What Bharatiya Vidya Stands for

Bharatiya Shiksha must ensure that no promising young Indian of character having faith in Bharat and her culture Bharatiya Vidya should be left without modern educational equipment by reason merely of want of funds.

2. Bharatiya Shiksha must be formative more than informative, and cannot have for its end mere acquisition of knowledge. Its legitimate sphere is not only to develop natural talents but so to shape them as to enable them to absorb and express the permanent values of Bharatiya Vidya.

3. Bharatiya Shiksha must take into account not only the full growth of a student's personality but the totality of his relations and lead him to the highest self-fulfilment of which he is capable.

4. Bharatiya Shiksha must involve at some stage or other an intensive study of Sanskrit or Sanskritic languages and their literature, without excluding, if so desired, the study of other languages and literature, ancient and modern.

5. The re-integration of Bharatiya Vidya, which is the primary object of Bharatiya Shiksha, can only be attained through a study of forces, movements, motives, ideas, forms and art of creative life-energy through which it has expressed itself in different ages as a single continuous process.

6. Bharatiya Shiksha must stimulate the student's power of expression, both written and oral, at every stage in accordance with the highest ideals attained by the great literary masters in the intellectual and moral spheres.

7. The technique of Bharatiya Shiksha must involve—

- (a) the adoption by the teacher of the *Guru* attitude which consists in taking a personal interest in the student; inspiring and encouraging him to achieve distinction in his studies; entering into his life with a view to form ideals and remove psychological obstacles; and creating in him a spirit of consecration; and
- (b) the adoption by the student of the *Shishya* attitude by the development of—
 - (i) respect for the teacher,
 - (ii) a spirit of inquiry,
 - (iii) a spirit of service towards the teacher, the institution, Bharat and Bharatiya Vidya.

8. The ultimate aim of Bharatiya Shiksha is to teach the younger generation to appreciate and live up to the permanent values of Bharatiya Vidya which flowing from the supreme art of creative life-energy as represented by Shri Ramachandra, Shri Krishna, Vyasa, Buddha and Mahavira have expressed themselves in modern times in the life of Shri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Swami Dayananda Saraswati, and Swami Vivekananda, Shri Aurobindo and Mahatma Gandhi.

9. Bharatiya Shiksha while equipping the student with every kind of scientific and technical training must teach the student, not to sacrifice an ancient form or attitude to an unreasoning passion for change; not to retain a form or attitude which in the light of modern times can be replaced by another form or attitude which is a truer and more effective expression of the spirit of Bharatiya Vidya; and to capture the spirit afresh for each generation to present it to the world.



R. Krishna Moorthy

30.8.62

आ नो भद्राः क्रतवो यन्तु विश्वतः ।

Let noble thoughts come to us from every side

—Rigveda, I-89-i

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MAHAYOGI

SRI AUROBINDO

BY

R. R. DIWAKAR

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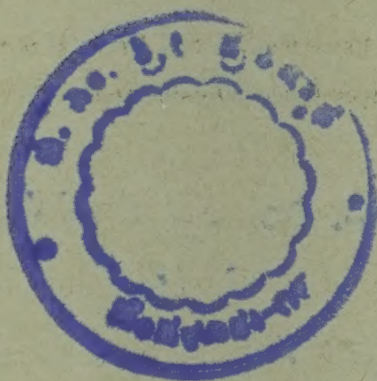
(Life, Sadhana and Teachings of Sri Aurobindo)

BY

R. R. DIWAKAR

Foreword by

K. M. MUNSHI



1962

BHARATIYA VIDYA BHAVAN

CHAUPATTY, BOMBAY

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294.561

ARAD

First Published on 15th August 1953, 5,000 copies

Second revised Enlarged Edition 1954, 10,000 ,,

Third revised Enlarged Edition 1962, 5,000 ,,

99 4575

Price Rs. 2/- Sh. 3/6 or \$ 0.90

Rupee Price (Outside India) Rs. 2.25

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PRINTED IN INDIA

BY P. H. RAMAN AT ASSOCIATED ADVERTISERS AND PRINTERS, 505, TARDEO ARTHUR ROAD, BOMBAY 34, AND PUBLISHED BY S. RAMAKRISHNAN, EXECUTIVE SECRETARY, BHARATIYA VIDYA BHAVAN, BOMBAY 7.

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GENERAL EDITOR'S PREFACE

THE Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan—that Institute of Indian culture in Bombay—needed a Book University, a series of books which, if read, would serve the purpose of providing higher education. Particular emphasis, however, was to be put on such literature as revealed the deeper impulses of India. As a first step, it was decided to bring out in English 100 books, 50 of which were to be taken in hand almost at once. Each book was to contain from 200 to 250 pages and was to be priced at Rs. 2/-.

It is our intention to publish the books we select, not only in English, but also in the following Indian languages: Hindi, Bengali, Gujarati, Marathi, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam.

This scheme, involving the publication of 900 volumes, requires ample funds and an all-India organisation. The Bhavan is exerting its utmost to supply them.

The objectives for which the Bhavan stands are the re-integration of the Indian culture in the light of modern knowledge and to suit our present-day needs, and the resuscitation of its fundamental values in their pristine vigour.

Let me make our goal more explicit.

We seek the dignity of man, which necessarily implies the creation of social conditions which would allow him freedom to evolve along the lines of his own temperament and capacities; we seek the harmony of individual efforts and social relations, not in any makeshift way, but within the frame-work of the Moral Order; we seek the creative art of life, by the alchemy of which human limitations are progressively transmuted, so that man may become the instrument of God, and is able to see Him in all and all in Him.

The world, we feel, is too much with us. Nothing would uplift or inspire us so much as the beauty and aspiration which such books can teach.

In this series, therefore, the literature of India, ancient

and modern, will be published in a form easily accessible to all. Books in other literatures of the world, if they illustrate the principles we stand for, will also be included.

This common pool of literature, it is hoped, will enable the reader, eastern or western, to understand and appreciate currents of world thought, as also the movements of the mind in India, which, though they flow through different linguistic channels, have a common urge and aspiration.

Fittingly, the Book University's first venture is the *Mahabharata*, summarised by one of the greatest living Indians, C. Rajagopalachari; the second work is on a section of it, the *Gita* by H. V. Divatia, an eminent jurist and a student of philosophy. Centuries ago, it was proclaimed of the *Mahabharata*: 'What is not in it, is nowhere.' After twenty-five centuries, we can use the same words about it. He who knows it not, knows not the heights and depths of the soul; he misses the trials and tragedy and the beauty and grandeur of life.

The *Mahabharata* is not a mere epic; it is a romance, telling the tale of heroic men and women and of some who were divine; it is a whole literature in itself, containing a code of life, a philosophy of social and ethical relations, and speculative thought on human problems that is hard to rival; but, above all, it has for its core the *Gita*, which is, as the world is beginning to find out, the noblest of scriptures and the grandest of sagas in which the climax is reached in the wondrous Apocalypse in the Eleventh Canto.

Through such books alone the harmonies underlying true culture, I am convinced, will one day reconcile the disorders of modern life.

I thank all those who have helped to make this new branch of the Bhavan's activity successful.

1, Queen Victoria Road,
New Delhi,
3rd October, 1951.

K. M. MUNSHI

FOREWORD

THE Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan is much indebted to my friend, Shri R. R. Diwakar, Governor of Bihar, for writing this valuable contribution to the Book University.

My own contact with Sri Aurobindo dates back to 1902 when, after passing the Matriculation examination, I joined the Baroda College. Though previously I had, only on occasions, the privilege of being in personal contact with him, the Aurobindonian legend in the College filled me with reverence, and it was with awe that I hung upon his words whenever he came to College as Professor of English. Later we were inspired by the stories of his *yogic* development. The *Bande Mataram* which he edited, was our inspiration for several years and in 1907 at the Surat Congress we were volunteers in the camp of the leaders, then called "Extremists", of whom he was one of the most inspiring.

I closely followed his career during those stormy years, particularly when he was tried in the Alipore Bomb Case. His Uttarpada speech, delivered some days after his acquittal, was a perennial source of inspiration to me. After he had retired to Pondicherry, I was for some years a constant reader of the *Arya*. It has not been possible for me to read all his published works; but whatever I have read has considerably influenced me.

My contact with Sri Aurobindo was resumed about 1945 through Dilip Kumar Roy and Sri Purani and I was privileged to receive his guidance on more than one occasion. A few months before he died, he accorded to me the very rare privilege of a long interview at the Ashram.

Sri Aurobindo's life and philosophy have many facets and it is impossible to do justice to his wondrous life, his profound and many-sided wisdom and achievements, not only

in the field of politics, philosophy and religion, but in the higher world of the Spirit.

He was the son of an anglicised Bengali. He received his education in a residential European school in Darjeeling. He was sent to England at the age of seven for a "thorough English education". It was this young man who, in the nineties of the last century, when leading Indians looked upon British Rule as a gift of Providence, not only conceived the idea of Indian Independence, but took steps to achieve it. In spite of his being entirely foreign-bred, the Mother—for, to him, India was the Mother—claimed him as her own and he became the prophet of our militant nationalism, spreading the cult of the "Eternal and Timeless India" among aspiring young men; founding revolutionary societies; leading an outspoken national wing to new ventures. Apart from secret societies founded and inspired by him, he attempted, though unsuccessfully, to convert the Congress into an instrument of revolutionary action. He gave to the country the programme of non-cooperation, boycott of British goods, national schools as a substitute for Government institutions, arbitration courts in place of the ordinary courts of law and volunteer organizations to prepare for mass action—a programme so successfully adopted by Gandhiji in succeeding decades.

As far back as 1906, he wrote:

"A divine Power is behind the movement; the *Zeit-Geist*, the Time-Spirit, is at work to bring about a mighty movement of which the world at the present juncture has need. That movement is the resurgence of Asia, and the resurgence of India is not only a necessary part of the larger movement but its central need. India is the keystone of the arch, the chief inheritor of the common Asiatic destiny. The idea of a free and united India has been born and grown to full stature in the land of the Rishis, and the

spiritual force of a great civilization of which the world has need, is gathering at its back."

We can all see that this prophecy is today being realised.

His call to sacrifice was a new gospel; it thrilled as in the first decade of this century as nothing else did:

"Political freedom is the life-breath of a nation. Without it a nation cannot grow, cannot expand... The work of national emancipation is a great and holy *yajna* of which boycott, Swadeshi, national education and every other activity, great and small, are only major and minor parts. Liberty is the fruit we seek from the sacrifice, and Motherland, the goddess to whom we offer it; into the seven leaping tongues of the fire of the *yajna* we must offer all that we are and all that we have, feeding the fire even with our blood and lives and happiness of our nearest and dearest; for the Motherland is the goddess who loves not a maimed and imperfect sacrifice, and freedom was never won from the gods by a grudging giver."

"Nationalism", he said, "is an *Avatar* and cannot be slain".

Then came the Alipore trial and no estimate of what the country thought of Sri Aurobindo can be better expressed than in the eloquent words which Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das addressed to the court:

"Long after this controversy is hushed in silence, long after this turmoil, this agitation ceases, long after he is dead and gone, Aurobindo will be looked upon as the poet of patriotism, as the prophet of nationalism and as the lover of humanity... his words will be echoed and re-echoed not only in India, but across distant seas and lands."

During the solitude of his jail life, he received the Mandate to be the instrument of the Divine Will and his Uttarpara speech is one of the finest expressions of a spirit which had outstripped the limitations of the ordinary mind.

His new message can best be summarised in his own words:

“First therefore become Indians. Recover the patrimony of your forefathers. Recover the Aryan thought, the Aryan discipline, the Aryan character, the Aryan life. Recover the Vedanta, the Gita, the Yoga. Recover them not only in intellect or sentiment but in your lives.”

From being an advocate of militant nationalism, Sri Aurobindo emerged as an apostle of Aryan culture, as one of the latest of a series of Masters which began with Vasistha and Vyas.

On the eve of his retirement to Pondicherry in 1910, Sri Aurobindo predicted that after a long period of war, world-wide upheaval and revolution, to begin in about four years, India would achieve her freedom.

At Pondicherry, the problem he set himself was how Divine Consciousness could be brought down, mobilized, organized and turned upon life.

At the same time, Sri Aurobindo became the greatest exponent of the Modern Indian Renaissance. He wrote on poetry, on art, on social life, on the progress of humanity. And on every subject he threw new light.

It is difficult to trace the life of the *Yogi*, but in his message to the country on the dawn of Freedom on August 15, 1947, Sri Aurobindo made a personal declaration of the aims and ideals he had conceived in his childhood and the fulfilment of which he had seen beginning:

“Those aims and ideals were, in their natural order, these: a revolution which would achieve India’s freedom and her unity; the resurgence and liberation of Asia and her return to the great role which she had played in the progress of human civilization; the rise of a new, a greater, brighter and nobler life for mankind which for its entire realisation would rest outwardly on an international unification of the separate existence of the peoples, preserving

and securing their national life but drawing them together into an overriding and consummating oneness; the gift by India of her means for the spiritualisation of life to the whole race; finally, a new step in the evolution which, by uplifting the consciousness to a higher level, would begin the solution of the many problems of existence which have perplexed and vexed humanity, since men began to think and to dream of individual perfection and a perfect society."

These aims and ideals he followed throughout his life with unwavering steadfastness, universalising his mind, and attempting to secure the Descent of the Supermind, to uplift the world. It would be presumptuous for me to attempt to describe this great adventure in spiritual thought and experience.

Suffice it to say that during the last century, there has not been another thinker of Sri Aurobindo's profundity or another *yogi* to fathom so scrupulously the mysteries of life.

Sri Aurobindo summarised the crisis through which humanity is passing in clear terms:

"At present mankind is undergoing an evolutionary crisis in which is concealed a choice of its destiny; for a stage has been reached in which the human mind has achieved in certain directions an enormous development, while in others it stands arrested and bewildered and can no longer find its way. A structure of the external life has been raised up by man's ever-active mind and life-will, a structure of an unmanageable hugeness and complexity, for the service of his mental, vital, physical claims and urges, a complex political, social, administrative, economic, cultural machinery, an organized collective means for his intellectual, sensational, aesthetic and material satisfaction. Man has created a system of civilization which has become too big for his limited mental capacity and understanding and his

still more limited spiritual and moral capacity to utilize and manage, a too dangerous servant of his blundering ego and its appetites. For no greater seeing mind, no intuitive soul of knowledge has yet come to his surface of consciousness which could make this basic fullness of life a condition for the free growth of something that exceeded it.... At the same time Science has put at his disposal many potencies of the universal Force and has made the life of humanity materially one; but what uses this universal Force is a little human individual or communal ego with nothing universal in its light of knowledge or its movements, no inner sense or power which would create in this physical drawing together of the human world a true life unity, a mental unity or a spiritual oneness."

And he provided a solution. He has rightly stressed that a perfected human world cannot be created by men who are themselves imperfect, and with equal emphasis he has discarded the egocentric gospel of individual liberation.

What he sought to achieve was the emergence of divine life on earth, not the isolated self-realization of a few individuals, and if he sought divinization of the inner being, he also placed in the forefront the transformation of our whole environment. In his words—"To become ourselves is the one thing to be done; but the true ourself is that which is within us, and to exceed our outer self of body, life and mind is the condition for this highest being, which is our true and divine being, to become self-revealed and active." In the *Human Cycle* he prophesies the advent of a new age, when the world will be one and social conflicts and the bitterness of life will be no more—a future to which man can look forward with hope and faith.

Sri Aurobindo presented mankind with a new hope and a new mission. He was the leader of the greatest revolt against scientific materialism which seeks to reduce man to

the position of an insect. He gave a new direction to the destiny of man.

Sri Diwakar's book is perhaps the most comprehensive review of the life and achievements of Sri Aurobindo published so far. Coming as it does from the pen of one who has been a devoted student not only of Sri Aurobindo's writings, but of our philosophy in general, it has a value of its own.

Few people in the present generation are able to appreciate the value of Sri Aurobindo's contribution to our nationalism, who between 1904 and 1909 gave a new shape to its form and content. Sri Diwakar himself, a nationalist who has gone through the fire of sacrifice during the struggle for freedom, has been able to put that aspect of Sri Aurobindo's life in the proper perspective.

Apart from the philosophic and mystic achievements of Sri Aurobindo, he has played a great part in appraising the true values of Indian culture, in discovering its fundamental values and their relation to the central ideas which have created India age after age since the Vedic times. Sri Diwakar has very rightly presented to us Sri Aurobindo's conception of India's mission in history.

Sri Diwakar's book, therefore, will serve as a guide to the heritage of ideas and achievements which Sri Aurobindo left behind him. Sri Aurobindo's writings are difficult to follow for the beginner, but with the guidance of this book, one can easily hope to go to the original works and benefit by their wisdom.

*Raj Bhavan,
Lucknow,
12th August, 1953.*

K. M. MUNSHI

INTRODUCTION

THIS would be, I thought, a task beyond both my ken and my capacity. But one cannot anticipate how circumstances conspire to force one into a situation in which he will act and do what is allotted to him as his rightful share of work in this strange world.

I must confess, however, that once I began this work, it grew upon me day by day. As I went on, I realized the magnitude of the task, but at the same time, felt more and more fascinated. However indifferent might be the performance, I now feel gratified that I was called to give it. The details of the lives of great men have always attracted me, and especially has it been so in the case of lives of saints and spiritual guides of humanity.

I have been an admirer and humble student of Aurobindo since my school days. His inspiring writings in "Yugantar", "Bande Mataram", and "Karmayogin", either in the original or in translation, were read by us with great avidity though, I am sure, our minds were not mature enough to understand their full significance. But I am equally sure that it was the higher, nobler, and more spiritual strain in these writings that drew us towards them. Not merely his politics but his philosophy also was like Soma to us.

I was hardly sixteen when Aurobindo retired from politics, but whatever he has written or said since has continued to hold my attention. I am happy to be the author of this brief study of his life, his Sadhana, and his teachings, and to have been able to give it in the hands of those who knew him, as well as of those who have yet to know him.

I am fully aware that this attempt is neither an exhaustive biography, nor a full picture of his inner life. Perhaps it may be said that it is not meant to be so. How

can I claim to capture the glory of the Himalayas or to probe into the mysteries of its unapproachable paths? I can only humbly say that these few pages are indicative rather than exhaustive, stimulative more than narrative, suggestive instead of being extensive. They are in the nature of a door to the great heritage that Aurobindo has left to posterity. This heritage is at once vast, rich, and varied. What he wrote and said is suffused with his unique experiences. The literature that he has left, therefore, is full of high inspiration, divine intuition, and prophetic vision.

I have no doubt that he was one of those giant spirits that on occasion stride across this world of pygmies, shedding fresh light, giving new life, and expanding the frontiers of human vision and consciousness. His has been the greatest spiritual adventure in modern times.

Man is busy expanding his knowledge of the physical world and is trying to extend his control over things external to himself. There is boldness, ambition and an element of engaging romance in it. All this is enchanting. Who can say that the splitting of the atom or the conquest of Everest are dull and dry tasks when even a casual account of them is thrilling in the extreme to the common reader? How exciting and intoxicating must be the adventure itself!

The tragedy of the present age, however, lies elsewhere. It is in the partial yet fatal neglect of our inner selves. The research of modern science in that direction has been too recent and too inadequate. A far greater effort and spirit of adventure is necessary for utilizing the spiritual knowledge already there and to explore further avenues for the control and the conquest of the inner consciousness. Our Everest now is not perched on the bright snow-capped tops of the majestic Himavat but in the dimly lighted chambers of our hearts. So long as man has not established his

Swaraj within himself, and so long his mind is swayed by passion and blind vital urges, we seek in vain the peace that should be ours, the harmony that should reign in our affairs, and the joy that should fill our being.

Aurobindo is the explorer *par excellence* in this century of that inner realm and I deem it a privilege to give here a glimpse into his life, his eventful struggle and ultimate triumph.

It is true that it would be very difficult, nay impossible, for anybody other than himself to write the whole story of his inner life, because "it did not lie on the surface." In connection with his own biography, he once made (19-11-'25, p. 113, "Dakshina" Aug. 1951) the following remark: "It is impossible to write my biography. Moreover, there is no meaning in the writing of biographies of poets, philosophers, and Yogis. The reason is they do not live in their outer actions which are visible to the people. It is quite different in the case of heroes like Napoleon, Julius Caesar and others who seek their development through action." But now that he has passed into unseen and unknown regions, and since he did not choose to write when he could have written, we have to be satisfied with what we can assemble from the stray hints and suggestions he has left behind. And let it be said that he has not left too little. It is perhaps more than enough to give us some sidelights on the grim fight his soul waged for all of us in the inner world, and to allow us to witness and assess the great epic role he played. Whether we realize it or not, it is out of the Vast Unknown, the Anand of the Upanishads, that we all come. It is in it that we live and move and have our being, and into it again we eventually merge. We have our all too brief spell of conscious life but we know neither the many subtler folds of consciousness, nor our

beginning, nor our end. And yet we have glimpses, in fortunate moments, of our intimacy and integration with the uncharted ocean of Being and Becoming, and of the Purushottam, wherein they both find their synthesis and meaning. It is in this region of the very substance of our existence that the spirit of Aurobindo holds the light for those who care to delve deep into it. May he guide us from darkness to light, from falsehood to truth, and from death to immortality.

A few words now about the simple scheme of the book. In the first seven chapters I have dealt more with the facts of Aurobindo's life and the gradual development of the drama of which he is the hero. Chapters eight to eleven deal especially with his Sadhana, Siddhi, and Teachings. Undoubtedly in my opinion, increasing knowledge of his Sadhana is far more important to humanity than anything else. It is of direct help to all seekers of Truth.

I hope this humble effort will commend itself to all students of the Mahayogi, who was in our midst but three years ago. By now, he must again have resumed his eternal pilgrimage.

I have tried to make the publication as useful as possible by giving a few appendices, a small bibliography, a glossary, and an index. I must thank Shri K. M. Munshi, the President of the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, for having agreed to publish this book in the popular Bhavan's Book University and for having agreed to bring it out on the 15th of August, a day consecrated and sacred in so many ways.

I take this opportunity also to thank the friends who have encouraged me to write this book, especially Surendra Mohan Ghose, Surendranath Jauhar, Keshav Poddar and Nolini Kant Gupta.

Thanks are due to Prof. K. K. Dutt of Patna for supplying me with some useful material and to R. S. Rao, P. R.

Gadagkar, and S. O. Potter for helping me in preparing the manuscript, the glossary and the index.

*Raj Bhavan,
Ranchi,
10th June, 1953.*

R. R. DIWAKAR

NOTE TO THE THIRD EDITION

It is a matter for great satisfaction that this book on Sri Aurobindo by Sri R. R. Diwakar which is in great demand, is being published in the third edition (20th thousand).

He has corrected certain discrepancies of dates etc. pointed out by friends like Sri R. K. Prabhu and others, to whom he feels grateful.

He has added two important appendices, one on 'Sri Aurobindo's Early Life in England' and another on 'Sri Aurobindo's Guru,' both of which, we believe, would be welcomed and appreciated by readers.

PUBLISHERS



CHAPTER I

TIMES AND TRENDS

LIFE might be likened to a mighty stream of intangible force pushing forward and upward, ever evolving, ever organising matter for its own purpose, and ever making its way through the encircling inert mass in which it lies involved. It expresses itself in myriad ways. At present, humanity is the acme of this vital current, the *elan vitale*, and we billions of human beings are but insignificant tiny particles of spray in the multitudinous surge that flows on and on for ever.

In and through life, consciousness and mind peep at us, giving us a glimpse of the direction in which individualized psyche is proceeding on this planet. Though we can assert with some certainty the probability of life elsewhere on other planets, we cannot imagine its condition there. Conditions of matter here however, seem to offer peculiar difficulties and the passage of life is long and arduous and often tortuous. But in spite of this, the progress of life is not insignificant, since according to scientists, it is but a few million or billion years that life-mind began its perilous yet eventful journey on this earth. Moreover, there is every proof that life and mind are advancing and are likely to make new conquests. There is every hope that the next step may be as momentous a leap as the last one from the anthropoid ape to homo sapiens.

Among us, it is given to few individuals to live not merely like all others, but to remind humanity of its high destiny, to find out new ways and direct its steps towards the higher planes of existence. Obviously life and mind are not the highest terms of existence. There are already intimations to human consciousness that matter, life, and mind are themselves but manifestations of a subtler and far more

mysterious force. Man has glimpses of it when his consciousness transcends the ego, when he is inspired, and when he is acting through his intuition as an instrument of that force immanent in nature. It is that kind of higher existence that life itself and every one alive, consciously or unconsciously, is seeking. Sri Aurobindo was undoubtedly one of the rare individuals who have, from time to time, tried to lift humanity out of the common rut of normal life in order to raise it in the scale of evolution. His contribution to world-thought has been manifold and multi-sided and of a significantly rare quality. In the field of Yoga, of spiritual Sadhana and attainment especially, it has been fundamental and unique, and in certain respects entirely revolutionary.

It is said that normally all men and women are the creatures of their time. However true this might be of the common run of people, there are exceptions. And Sri Aurobindo was certainly among the exceptions to an eminent degree. Persons like him, while they rise out of the surrounding environment and are influenced by it, are also to a very great extent, the creators of their times. They are the creature-creators of history in the same sense that "the child is the father of man". They are influenced by circumstances in that they are not out of context but at the same time they contribute something so original and leave their impress so indelibly on the sands of time, that generations follow in their footsteps and whole eras are often named after them.

It is now a recognized fact that a child's psyche is very much alive and active and absorbent even from the time it draws its very first breath. And in the case of Aurobindo, it was no ordinary child as is evidenced by the precocity shown by him even in his early days. His genius, as it expanded, concerned itself with almost every aspect of human activity and he ultimately evolved a philosophy of life which was total and integral. It is necessary to know, therefore,

the wind that was blowing, the forces that were working and the influences that were playing around him in the days of his birth, early life and education.

From these and many other points of view and in order to understand the full significance of Aurobindo's life and actions, his ideas and Sadhana, his Siddhi and teachings, it will be very helpful to have before us an outline of the background and the general trends of his time. It will substantially aid us in relating his thoughts and doings to circumstances then prevailing.

It should be noted, however, that the background I give and the trends I indicate are not in the same form and shape as would be given by a writer of today, who would see things in quite a different perspective. I shall try to reconstruct a picture in the same form in which it was present to the observers, thinkers, and reformers of those days. After all, people living and acting in those times had to face problems and combat forces as they saw them and gauged them then. We today, in our wisdom or folly, might differ from the view that they took of things, but we cannot escape from the fact that they did take a certain view and acted upon it with certain results. Here we shall indicate the manner in which the people of those days were affected by certain facts and events and not state the mere views or facts as they were or might have been.

In this chapter the period dealt with is roughly from A.D. 1858-93. This covers a total of thirty-five years, fourteen of which immediately precede the birth of Aurobindo but follow the most ruthless suppression by the government, of the war of independence waged by the patriotic elements that were still left in India after decades of British rule. It has often been dinned into the ears of students of Indian history, by official and pro-British writers, that this war was "a mutiny" and that great atrocities were

committed by the Indian soldiery. It was reserved for Indian patriots and historians who came later to assert that it was not a mutiny but a war of liberation, as sacred as was ever fought between foreign usurpers and the sons of the soil. This period also covers twenty-one years after Sri Aurobindo's birth, which includes not only the years of his childhood but also those that he spent in England for his education. It was only in 1893 that he returned to India and settled down in Baroda till his final departure for Calcutta thirteen years later. Although Aurobindo did show some signs of patriotic activity while in England, it is proper that his active preparation for his career in India should be counted from the date of his stay in Baroda. This is why I have chosen the period 1858-93.

It will be more convenient to deal separately with the political, economic, religious and social, educational and cultural fields while considering this period. It may help readers to note that I am dealing not so much with calendar dates as with forces and influences that were moving in this vast country in those days. They were the same and almost uniform throughout the country mainly because, the whole of India was under the iron heel of the British except where titular Kings and Maharajahs were allowed to carry on a kind of autonomous rule in their States. There the joys and sorrows of the people swayed according to steps adopted by the respective rulers. Even in the States called Indian India, in contrast with British India, the shadow of British rule was thick and no breath of free movement was allowed to stir. A common bond of slavery, a uniform code of laws, a common pattern of bureaucratic rule, all gave to India a unity under the British which was helpful to her in forging a unity of interest and in organising a common fight for freedom.

The British forces emerged triumphant after the last

Indian military defeat in 1857. Merciless repression followed, tempered only by a promise of good and beneficent rule and an attempt to make the administration firm and efficient. Indian military forces were completely disintegrated and there was no immediate prospect of any future rising. Nationwide emasculation followed as a result of the disarming of all citizens almost without any discrimination. The British saw to it that the princes and other forces which had opposed them were fully liquidated while those that had stood by them were rewarded but kept in such a condition that they would never be able to become a source of trouble. This does not, however, mean that all opposition to British rule died down. It was only driven underground and took different shapes on different occasions. In 1863 there was a rising of the Wahabis which was half-religious and half-political in motive. In 1859 there was a big agrarian rising of indigo cultivators in Bengal. Mr. Grant, the then Lieutenant-Governor, expressed great surprise regarding their marvellous organisation and discipline. There was a similar rising of agriculturists in Bombay province in 1874. But it must be admitted that there was nothing "all-India" about these sporadic risings. Nor can one call them political so much as economic. These apart, there were some smouldering embers here and there and certainly a few bold and defiant spirits who dreamt of a future revolution. Undoubtedly it was these who formed the nuclei of some of the revolutionary attempts in the future. But it can be safely said that there was nothing on the horizon nor below it in the way of an organised violent force which could be taken seriously by the British rulers as something worthy of consideration or of strong action. The rulers were quite safe and secure to chew the cud and ruminate in the vast pasture that had fallen to their lot.

On the other front namely, that of public opinion and

constitutional agitation, Congress was born in 1885 (only eight years before Aurobindo's return from England). But prior to its birth, there were three separate associations already functioning in Calcutta, Bombay and Madras. Public opinion often expressed itself, though very mildly, through the medium of these bodies, as well as through newspapers, of which there were already more than five hundred by that time. By 1885, however, public-spirited men working in the three provincial bodies, together with some others, felt that they should have an all-India platform which could be called truly national, that is non-sectional and non-communal. Congress was the result. The people in authority in those days encouraged it for their own reasons and it developed into an annual forum for ventilating political as well as other grievances against the government of the day. Though avowal of loyalty was for many many years, a regular feature of the proceedings, protests and strongly worded resolutions were also not wanting. But the youth of the country were not very satisfied with this kind of petitioning and barren resolutions. The result was that impatient extremism slowly began to make itself felt in the country.

Thus, though patriotism that expressed itself in violence was hardly in existence, there was a slow but sure rise of a generation which resented foreign rule along with all its denationalising effects. National sentiment of the Italian and Irish brand was making headway. If some were stirred by economic evils, there were others like Aurobindo who thought that whatever else happened, foreign rule must end at any cost. Young and ardent spirits realized that there was no scope for them and no hope even of serving their country to capacity under the blighting conditions that existed. Generally speaking, the superiority complex of the rulers, their patronizing attitude, their utter contempt for things Indian, their gross ignorance about India, all con-

tributed to the speedy spread of the deep sense of national insult which the continuation of foreign rule really was. In other spheres of life came a new awakening and a stir of consciousness regarding India's great past, which strengthened the forces of aggressive nationalism. People were no longer satisfied with sending petitions and passing resolutions and leading deputations. They began to hanker after action. This deep dissatisfaction led to great political movements in India beginning with the Bengal Partition in 1906 and ending with that of "Quit India" in 1942. Aurobindo almost instinctively belonged to the rising generation which was more than impatient about the slow methods of Congress. It drew its inspiration from a basic national consciousness which demanded freedom as its birthright. It was intensely conscious of a mission and of India's destiny in the world. This spirit was the precursor of a great national mass awakening which ultimately trampled under foot all opposition from inside as well as outside, and triumphed over all forces that stood in the way of its onward march.

Now to the economic field.

The British, who came to India as traders, fought like adventurers, intrigued like consummate politicians, and ultimately stumbled upon an empire vaster than that of Asoka and richer than that of the Moghuls. But the shrewdest of them were never enamoured of the "empire" aspect. Although sometimes they indulged in shows incidental to all empires, they did so because it was necessary, and not because they loved or liked it. The trader in them never died, nay, that attitude was fostered and they flourished. They thought constantly in terms of rupees, annas and pies. Napoleon, always busy building empires, contemptuously called them a nation of shopkeepers. He lost his empire in no time but the British kept their shopkeeping and, were quite safe and prosperous. In the last decade when faced

with the loss of the Indian empire, they handed it over with good grace so that they might be able to retain the shop-part of it! Empire lost, but business as usual! They did not want to risk the loss of both.

Thus economic exploitation was the dominating motive throughout the period of British occupation. The industrial revolution in England helped and accelerated the process. The British began to look upon India as a supplier of raw material and upon her vast population as the consumer of goods manufactured in England. In the fulfilment of this objective, they were ruthless and remorseless. During the process, a number of flourishing industries in India either perished or languished and thus made room for imports. Neither industry nor shipbuilding was encouraged in India. The main strings of commerce and banking were held by British merchants and firms. Thus India continued to become poorer and poorer and the pressure on the land increased enormously. Railways and other communications were developed, either from the point of view of military security or that of exploitation of India's resources for the benefit of British interests. Dadabhai Naoroji and Romesh Chandra Dutt were the most effective critics of this policy. Even today their writings make very eloquent though painful reading. No political power in the world has been used with such deadly economic effect on so vast a scale as it was by the British in India. Systematic impoverishment, large scale export of raw materials, import of consumers' goods which were once manufactured here, the death of certain industries and stagnation in the progress of others—this was the pitiable economic scene in India during the years under review. The Swadeshi movement organised by a small minority which had by that time become somewhat politically conscious could be the only answer. This stress on Swadeshi

became later a political weapon and, with the addition of boycott, a potent means of agitation.

The appeal of nationalism as a deep-seated emotion of love for one's own land, its people, and its culture, was reinforced by an awakened sense of being economically exploited by the British. The virulent attacks on British economic policy during the Swadeshi agitation from 1906-10 are explainable only in this context and on account of this grievance. Buying one's own country's manufactures and giving full encouragement to them was the milder and constructive phase of this movement.

In the religious and social fields, the British rulers did not attempt any intervention. On the contrary, they observed a studied neutrality. Their experience in 1857 had taught them how explosive some of the religious sentiments of the people could be. Moreover, letting them alone did not come in the way either of political dominance, economic exploitation or administrative efficiency. This attitude, on the other hand, built up for them a reputation for religious tolerance which was quite helpful to them, as they were foreigners in race, religion as well as nationality.

But this did not mean that as a general rule, they had any great respect for India's religion, either Hindu or Muslim. Possibly most of those who came as officers were ignorant about it and some of them probably had deep prejudices. They derived their knowledge from missionaries and scholars and by direct observation and study, if at all any of them cared to give some time to it. Not many scholars had made a deep study of Indology at that time. Thus the vast amount of intelligent literature we now have, which throws light on the religion and philosophy of India, was not then available. India had not been revealed to the West in that sense. All those who came here had hardly enough time to study India deeply. Superficial observation on the

other hand revealed a number of differences to them which seemed strange. Most of them looked at our religion and social practices with a superiority complex. Since they had conquered India, most of them were persuaded that she was inferior in every respect. This approach vitiated their whole outlook on Indian religion, culture and society.

In spite of their studied neutrality in matters of religion however, the rulers had definitely a soft corner for both missionaries and Christianity. This is easily explainable. Both were familiar to them, in fact they were their own. And also they were new to the land and therefore worth encouraging. In their eyes, Christianity was far better than the religion which existed in India. But in the bargain, the picture of Hinduism which the missionaries might have given to the rulers must have naturally been one which was favourable for the spread of Christianity and unfavourable for the existing religion.

In social matters, such as "Sati" and Child marriage, the rulers showed great anxiety for reform and were eager to help local reformers even to the extent of sponsoring legislation.

While this was the attitude of the rulers and of westerners generally in those days, there was also a great internal ferment in Hinduism itself. Shri Ramakrishna Paramahansa had already made his appearance. All the sponsors of reformist movements based on western patterns had sat up in amazement. There were movements like those of Brahmo Samaj and Prarthana Samaj, which sought to reform Hinduism on some kind of Christian pattern. Many of the English-educated had already taken to them. But Shri Ramakrishna's Sadhana as well as Siddhi had proved beyond all doubt that it is necessary to have a sympathetic outlook in matters of religion, that all religions have the same truth as their foundation, and that Hinduism, Yoga

and devotion were quite adequate to take a man to the highest reaches of consciousness. It was Ramakrishna with his simple teachings and his mass and class following as well as his distinguished disciple Naren (the future Vivekananda, who was to be the first missionary of Vedanta to the West), who rehabilitated Hindu philosophy both in India and abroad. Above all, the comprehensive nature of Ramakrishna's teaching, its inclusiveness, its humanity and universality appealed to everyone, irrespective of nationality, religion, caste, creed, or sex.

Swami Dayanand, the founder of Arya Samaj, was responsible for another drive which had already made its effective appearance against Christian as well as Islamic onslaught on Hindu religion and philosophy. His was a double mission: defence against attack from outsiders and attack against what he believed to be evils which had grown in Hinduism. His approach was patriotic and nationalistic in essence, but at the same time he was a social reformer of no mean order. While he defended Hinduism with the might of a Titan, he had his sledged-hammer always ready against what he thought were mere accretions to pure Vedic and Aryan Hinduism. He attacked all kinds of idolatry and had no kind word for the Puranas and the Pauranic gods. The Arya Samaj reverted to the Vedas, the daily Homa, and the four Varnas as against the hundreds of castes current in those as well as in these days. He laid the greatest possible stress on Brahmacharya and character-building and encouraged the ancient system of education through residential Ashramas. Sanskrit teaching also received a great stimulus from the Arya Samaj.

Thus the first phase of admiration for Christianity and a tendency to reform Hinduism on that pattern had passed away. Patriotic admiration and respect for what was good in religious thought in India had already taken its place.

The accretions and overgrown evils were marked off from the original basic elements, spiritual, philosophical and social. Aurobindo's approach was more along the lines of Ramakrishna's teachings than any other school of thought current in those days. The difference however, is obvious. Aurobindo had a vast background of knowledge and experience of western thought and religion which Ramakrishna lacked. But in his instinctive sympathy with all that is high and noble in Indian spirituality, in intuitive appreciation and realization of it, and in the adoption of a truly spiritual and synthetic attitude towards all religions and human endeavour in that field, Aurobindo is nearer to Ramakrishna than all other Indian thinkers and reformers. Ramakrishna does not seem to have had any special ideas or theory of social reform. His conduct was based on Vedantic as well as Tantric truths and he looked upon all human beings as equal and thus worthy of respect. His worship of Kali, the Mother Goddess, as Shakti was the key to the respect shown by him and his followers to women.

In the educational field, a step fatal to Indian ideals and indigenous learning was taken when a new policy was laid down according to the famous minutes of Macaulay. There was a complete break in tradition and a departure was made in favour of a merely intellectual and so-called liberal type of western education, in which mastery of the English language occupied the most predominant place. Everything else was subordinated. The old system languished, both Hindu and Muslim, as all recognition, patronage, and encouragement was extended only to the new type of teaching. The result was the production of a new set of intellectuals, learned in English but without any traditional background. This created a new caste of people in India, who sought the patronage of the rulers. Being ignorant of their great heritage, they had no love for the thoughts and

ideas, customs and manners either of their contemporaries in society or of their forefathers and parents. It was this class of people who were Indian in form but completely denationalized in everything else. Sometimes they were referred to as the Manas-putras (psychological progeny) of the west. The choice of English as the medium of education also effectively blocked the growth of the many regional languages. Thus Sanskrit, which was the basis and aspiration for all Indian languages was thrown into the background and other languages were left to their respective fates. Both in the capital, and in the provinces, English was established as the official language. It became the language of courts, of high schools and of the universities. The growth and progress of all Indian languages was thus checked both in official quarter and in the field of education.

What happened to education, naturally happened to all indigenous art and culture. Generally speaking, the rulers had no love for local art and culture, except by way of admiration for curios. The curse of imperialistic tendencies asserted itself everywhere. Sometimes there was recognition of Indian art but that was more from the point of view of highbrow patronage than from the point of view of appreciation of intrinsic or superior merit. Painting, music, sculpture and literature were utterly neglected as also a hundred other crafts like ivory-carving and work in sandal wood, which require both imagination and a high degree of hand-skill. It was only at the courts of the Rajahs and Maharajahs who had not fallen prey to indiscriminate westernization that these arts were kept alive and received some recognition. What was more distressing was the fact that they had no place in the whole of the educational system. The educated emerged from their schools and colleges quite innocent of the art treasures of their own land and, what

was worse, with a very crude and distorted taste for cheap western substitutes.

While this was the general deplorable condition, it should be said to their eternal credit that, some English and other western scholars and art-critics tried to rehabilitate the literary and cultural values of Sanskrit and to preserve the treasures to be found in other Indian languages as also in the fine arts and crafts of India. It was they, together with some Indians, who were pioneers in the renaissance. Aurobindo was among the leading spirits who recognised the renaissance and lent his powerful pen to the cause when he began to take part in public life.

Thus, on the whole, during this period, though a military victory had given the British a tighter grip, though they had evolved a strong administrative machinery, though the new educational system sought to create and plant a new race of English-educated "brown-British" people in the midst of a vast Indian population, though everything Indian, whether it was art or religion, language or philosophy, was a matter for neglect and derision, a strong and powerful but peaceful reaction had already set in. In all fields of human activity, there were men of faith and vision who were successfully attacking all evil from outside and at the same time trying to salvage whatever was good and noble and healthy in things Indian. They were trying to strike new lines of progress on the basis of Indian tradition. Thus the renaissance had begun. Fortunately for India, most of the workers in all fields were alive to what was good in the west and tried to adopt it without any narrow and blind feelings about the superiority of everything Indian just because it was Indian.

Now a few words about the forces working in the world about this period. India, though seemingly a geographically closed entity, has since the very dawn of history been in close touch with several other countries and had exchanges

with the thought currents of the world. This contact might at times have been meagre, these exchanges might often have been slight. But the fact that they were there cannot be denied and is significant.

It is well known that in India's pre-history and early history she traded both by land and by sea with the Phœnicians and was in contact with Egypt, Babylon, and Persia. Later, her contacts with Greece and Rome and the Arab countries were far closer. As well as merchandise, there is no doubt that ideas were exchanged on a big scale. After the advent of Buddhism and especially after the evolution of Mahayana Buddhism, India's contact with Tibet and China continued without break for several centuries. The names and languages, the mighty architectural and sculptural remains in the big and small islands of South East Asia are living proof of India's contact with the East. It is no wonder that she is so rich in her heritage. She has always acted and reacted to outside and foreign influences and has never lived in complete seclusion or isolation. She has never shown a fanatical-aborrence for things foreign which usually results in sealing one's own frontiers. The consequence in such cases is stagnation, physical, mental and spiritual.

The period under consideration has been chosen as I have already pointed out, mainly with reference to the biography of a great person and therefore it has no direct relation with any particular period of history. But we can easily see what great ideas and forces were working in the world round about that time.

In the world of political ideas, the declaration of American Independence in 1776 and the bursting of the French Revolution in Europe in 1789 had brought about thorough changes. Monarchy, feudalism, colonialism, autocratic, aristocratic, oligarchic or arbitrary rule, rule without the consent of the governed, had all been shaken to their roots.

The flood-gates of democratic and modern republican ideas had been thrown open. The idea of liberty and equality of all citizens, the consciousness of the fundamental rights to freedom of conscience, opinion, expression, and association filled the atmosphere.

There was another very important development in the political world and that was the birth of modern nationalism. In the hands of Gieuseppe Mazzini, the great Italian patriot, it evolved into a new type of regional religion which supplied great fervour and zeal to freedom movements everywhere. He can be truly called "the prophet of nationalism". Each people, he said, has a duty to perform and a destiny to fulfil in the world and they must do it. Freedom from foreign rule, he added, is the first condition of being able to do so. By "each people" he meant a group or groups of people living together in a geographical area and bound by ties of race, language, culture, and by common history, common memory, common suffering, and above all by common economic, social, and political interests. This idea emphasises the common interests of people living within certain defined territorial boundaries. It has the effect of converting a merely geographical expression in the form of a country into a mass of people awakened to their common interests and bound by a bond of brotherhood based on as many natural common ties as possible. This great idea has at some time or other during the course of the last century profoundly influenced almost every country and every people in the world. In fact, recently every new political awakening of people in different countries has been due to the urge of modern nationalism. That in essence is the basis of the democratic principle of self-determination and autonomy.

The two countries on the continent of Europe whose fight for freedom inspired Indian patriots more than any other were Ireland and Italy. In both countries, it was the spirit

of nationalism that stirred the people to almost superhuman sacrifice, for the sake of freedom. Love of one's own language, of one's own culture, of one's country's manufactures, love of the sons of the soil, herculean efforts to revive past arts and traditions, serious attempts to understand their own genius and to foster legitimate pride in their past, these were the forms that nationalism took in these two countries. In India new-born nationalism also took a similar course. The names of De Valera and Michael Collins of Ireland and of Mazzini and Garibaldi of Italy were favourites with young and budding nationalists in India for many many years.

In the field of economics, the invention of the steam engine and the discovery of electric power together with the progress of modern science had already paved the way for what is popularly known as the Industrial Revolution. The whole of the economic and social structure in Europe and America was undergoing a profound change. England was the leading power in this matter and it so happened that England was ruling India. If India had been a free country and had adopted western methods as Japan did, what the course of Indian history would have been is a matter for idle conjecture. But what actually happened was that the industrial advance of England meant ironically enough, the exploitation of India as a market for buying raw materials and for selling finished goods. We know what dire consequences ultimately followed this process. But apart from this, the use of power for mechanical manufacture as well as for transport and communications, the advance of mechanical engineering and technology, the advance of science on the whole, brought about very drastic changes in the means of production and distribution. The immediate result was concentration of wealth as well as distributive power in the hands of a few and a concentration of labour and the proletariat in industrial centres. This led to the birth of

socialistic ideas and the masterly minds of Marx and Engels built up a philosophy based upon pure materialism and on the play of forces without a soul. The Communist Manifesto, published in 1848, was a clarion call given to "the workers of the world" to unite and strike and bring about a new millennium. Though this philosophy did not take root in Russia until the formation of the Lenin-Stalin axis, it was clear that the days of *laissez-faire* in the industrial and economic field were as certainly over as were autocracy and aristocracy in politics, and birthrights and class privileges in the social sphere.

While the western world was surrounded by these new and various forces and ideas, renascent India was re-shaping herself. The difference was that India was not exposed directly to these forces since she was under political and economic domination. It was only through England and mainly through the English language that she was influenced by the then current of world thought.

It was at a time when these were the contending forces that Sri Aurobindo made his appearance. Now that the outline of the picture present to the youthful and patriotic spirits of those days is before us, a fuller understanding of his approach and attitude, and appreciation of the line of thought and action he adopted is far easier.

CHAPTER II

ENVIRONMENT AND PARENTAGE

THE last chapter outlines general trends in the way of life and thought in India as well as in the world during that period. Now let us have a cursory look at the picture of Bengal, Aurobindo's immediate environment at the time of his birth and during his early life, that is, from about 1872

to 1880. He was sent to Manchester, England, in 1879 for education, to return only in 1893.

During the Indian Renaissance, already in full swing in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, great personalities contributed their mite to the general awakening in every field of Indian thought. They created a new outlook. The first wave of unqualified admiration for everything British and western and the inferiority complex which characterized the first two or three generations of the English-educated Indians, had subsided. It was realized that the wholesale substitution or transplantation of any western language, thought and culture was neither practicable nor desirable nor necessary. It was generally conceded that a solid substratum in many fields existed in India but that it stood in need of restatement, reorientation, and revitalization in the light of modern thought and science. A great deal of what was entirely new to India, especially modern science, stood in need of being adapted to Indian conditions. The historical perspective, the nationalistic outlook, the modern democratic spirit, the scientific approach and method were some of the most important things in the modern world that impressed the leaders and prominent public-spirited men of India. In fact, almost every progressive thinker had come to the conclusion that India was a very congenial field for systematic fusion of what was best in the East and the West. For various reasons, Bengal had contributed much to the universal renaissance in India, and Bengal was the province in which Aurobindo was born. He later chose that itself as the field for his most active public life.

The names of a few of the important personalities who initiated new trends in renascent Bengal, and not a few of them subsequently in the whole of India, will give us some idea of the atmosphere there at the time. Before dealing with Bengal, we should pause to pay homage to some great

souls in other parts of India. Mrs. Annie Besant, Subramanya Iyer, Kasturi Rangayyengar, K. T. Telang, M. G. Ranade, G. K. Gokhale, Lokmanya Tilak, Swami Dayanand, Lajpat Rai, Dadabhai Naoroji, Ferozeshah Mehta, Anand Coomaraswamy as well as many others had in different provinces contributed substantially to the reawakening of the soul of renascent India. They were poineers who stirred the spirit of nationalism by invoking the glories and achievements of the past, by infusing in the people a new kind of zeal to make a supreme effort to rise and march ahead, and to throw themselves open to new thought and modern science. They embodied in different degrees and in different fields of activity the very spirit of newly-awakened India. Most of them were scholars of note. Many of them had studied Sanskrit and the past history of India. They had reverence and admiration for the valuable traditions of India, they had respect for the West and its modern achievement. They loved India and her people intensely. They felt that her future lay in assimilating and adapting the teaching of the West, in re-building her life on the firm and unshakable foundations of her great and ancient past, and in casting away irrational and meaningless accretions.

In Bengal, Raja Ram Mohan Roy had long ago led the way in the matter of English Education and social reform. Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar had strongly advocated female education. As usually happens in the case of national awakening, consciousness of one's own language is the first in stirring a people. Michael Madhusudan Dutt and Bankim Chandra were poineers in this matter in Bengal. Later, Rabindranath who was to render invaluable service to Bengali as well as to English, came to be known as the Poet of Asia. In the field of religious reform, Devendranath and Keshub Chandra Sen were the pillars of the Brahmo movement, though later schismatic tendencies developed. But the

profoundly spiritual Ramakrishna and his powerful and eloquent disciple Vivekananda established the supremacy of Vedanta and the Yoga systems and stabilized what was best in the traditional ways of worship and devotion. The latter especially revived and vivified the missionary spirit which took Vedanta and Yoga to distant lands. In the field of art, Havell and Abanindranath led the way and put on a firm footing the Indian style of painting. In the field of science, the names of Profulla Chandra Ray and Jagadish Bose became household words. Thus, we see that in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, Bengal was in the forefront of the renaissance in almost every field of activity. None could have escaped the vibrant atmosphere that was thick with new life, new trends and new hopes.

True renaissance begins with self-discovery leading to self-realization and to the full expression of the soul of a nation. It is true that comprehensive impact with the West, especially through England and the English language, the progress of political thought, the stirring achievements of nationalism, and the dazzling triumphs of science, helped to fill the mind of the educated Indian with ideas of national freedom, civil liberty, and material progress. But one should not mistake this alone as the spirit of the renaissance that was bestirring the very soul of India. The genuine urge was deeper, it yearned for liberation not merely from the foreign yoke which was but the result of inner weakness, but also from the bondage of all that was dross, and from the encrustations of centuries, so that the Soul of India might shine resplendent in its full and innate glory. Freedom from British rule was but a part of the urge.

This spirit was encouraged and enlivened by the researches of great western and Indian scholars such as Monier Williams, William Jones, Wilson, Colebrooke, Roth, Schlegel, Bopp, Max Muller and others. No less distinguished were

scholars like Rajendra Lal Mitra, Bhau Daji, Bhandarkar, R. C. Dutt, Manishankar Jatashankar, Tilak, and Dayanand, to name but a few.

Testimony is given by many writers, both Indian and foreign, that the Indian renaissance was neither superficial nor a passing wave. It was "the deep calling to the deep". R. W. Frazer in his "Literary History of India", (pp.446-447), significantly observes, "Men such as Ram Mohan Roy, Keshub Chandra Sen, Michael Madhusudan Dutt, Bankim Chandra Chatterji, Kashinath Trimbak Telang are no bastard bantlings of a western civilization; they were creative geniuses worthy to be reckoned in the history of India with such men of old as Kalidas, Chaitanya, Jayadev, Tulsidas, and Shankaracharya and destined in the future to shine clear as the first glowing sparks sent out in the fiery turmoil where old and new were fusing". While writing about Indian Nationalism, Ramsay Macdonald in his "Government of India", observes, "it is the revival of a historical tradition, the liberation of the soul of a people". Annie Besant remarked it is "not a plant of mushroom growth but a giant of the forest with millennia behind it". While speaking about Tagore's poetry, Ramsay Macdonald himself burst into poetic language and said, "Tagore's poetry is India. It is the soul of a people, not merely the emotion of a man; a systematic view of life, not merely a poetic mood; a culture, not merely a tune."

With equal emphasis it should be said that this new spirit was neither selfish nor parochial nor national in a narrow sense. Sarojini Naidu in paying a compliment to Ram Mohan Roy remarked, "And Raja Ram Mohan Roy conveyed the message of this great civilization to the world. He had no exclusion. He had the all-inclusiveness which is characteristic of the universal quality of the mission of India". Swami Vivekananda on the 20th of September 1896 wrote

to one of his disciples from London, "You must not forget that my interests are international and not Indian alone". Gandhiji later emphasised, "Our nationalism can be no peril to other nations inasmuch as we will exploit none as we will allow none to exploit us. Through Swaraj we would serve the whole world."

While this was the nature of the renaissance and of the general atmosphere, it is strange that, Dr. Krishnadhan Ghose, father of Aurobindo, later became a confirmed believer in everything western though earlier he was inclined towards Brahmo Samaj. He came from a noted family of Konnagar village in the Hooghly district only eleven miles from Calcutta. He chose to study medicine and went to England for this purpose. In spite however, of a stern warning not to be led away by the glamour of western civilization from Rajnarayan Bose, his devout father-in-law, he returned to India an atheist, wholly Anglicized and denationalized. He became a votary of England, of English education, English customs, English manners, and English methods. After his return from Aberdeen, Scotland, where he had secured his M.D. degree, he was asked to perform *prayaschitta* (purification or expiation). He refused and showed moral courage in preferring to leave the village and to sell his property at a loss. But he seemed to have some regard for his orthodox mother. After her death he spent about a thousand rupees in Banaras according to her wishes. But his innate humanity and feeling for the suffering of others was very great and almost amounted to a religion. Throughout his career he spared neither effort nor money in trying to relieve those who suffered. He served as a Civil Surgeon in three districts and was popular by reason of his public-spirit, his sense of service, and his concern for the poor. His work in Bhagalpur, Rangpur, and Khulna was remembered for many years. His later years, however, were

made unhappy and he was embittered to a certain extent by domestic difficulties, his wife's hysteria, want of sufficient resources as well as a certain amount of personal laxity. It is said that he resorted even to alcohol in order to forget his unhappiness.

To the end of his life however, his views about things Indian remained unchanged. He pitied and at times ridiculed everything Indian, while his praise of all that was English and western was boundless. This tendency developed in him to such an extent that when the question of educating his children arose, he chose to put them into convent schools and at the earliest, sent them to England! Aurobindo was only seven when taken to England.

As if to counteract this extreme and almost irrational love for the West, while in the medical college, he married Swarnalata Devi, the eldest daughter of Rishi Rajnarayan Bose, a leader of the Brahmo Samaj, and one steeped almost equally in the knowledge of Vedant, Islam, and western thought. In a way, he was a composite of the various currents of culture which were influencing India but with a predominance of Vedantic spirituality. He was a very close student of the Upanishads. He spoke eloquently at meetings and wrote on occasion. His speech on "Hindu Dharmer Shreshthata" was assessed by Bipin Chandra Pal to be very powerful advocacy. He succeeded Devendranath Tagore as the president of the Calcutta Brahmo Samaj.

His daughter Swarnalata was an educated lady. She was capable of writing stories and dramatic pieces. But her powers could hardly find any opportunity for development in later days as she became a victim of a family malady. Sometimes, she became violent and beat her children. Once, it is said, Aurobindo quickly walked away while Manmohan, his elder brother, was being thrashed! But she retained the religious bent and devoutness of her father throughout life.

Dr. Krishnadhan and Swarnalata married in 1864 when they were nineteen and twelve respectively. He returned from England in 1871 after completing his education. The marriage was a mingling, so to say, of the then prevailing forces in the life-current of Bengal. Ultimately however, it was the latter force represented by Rishi Rajnarayan Bose that predominated. If one can so describe him, Sri Aurobindo was a symbol of the spirit-dominated awakened power of India in the field of Karma, Bhakti, and Jnan.

CHAPTER III

BIRTH, EARLY LIFE AND EDUCATION

SRI AUROBINDO was born in Calcutta, the third son of Dr. Krishnadhan Ghose and Swarnalata Devi. He had two elder brothers, Benoybhushan and Manmohan. In the year 1872 at 4.50 A.M. on the 15th of August this new child first drew breath. It was a date which had already been consecrated by the Mahasamadhi of Shri Ramakrishna Paramahansa. Aurobindo once explained the spiritual significance of the 15th of August. He remarked, "15th of August has a special significance—it is the day of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary; it implies that the physical nature is raised to the divine Nature. The Virgin Mary refers to Nature; Jesus is the divine soul born in man—he is the son of God as well as the son of man". (P. 4, "Mother India", August, 1952). This date was to become memorable from 1947 as the day of India's independence. The name Aurobindo (which means lotus) was chosen by his father because it was unique, and at that time rarely given to any one. It was found decades later, that there were a few persons bearing that name. But now it is quite commonly given not only to children but also to numerous public bodies and institutions!

Not much is known about this prodigy's early childhood which was spent with his parents in Khulna. But it is known that his father, who was a confirmed and pucca "Saheb" in every sense of the word, did not engage Bengali-speaking servants. They spoke either in English or in Hindi! He also saw that Aurobindo, together with his two brothers, was sent to a school which was wholly European and thus not contaminated by Indian influence! It was the Loretto Convent School at Darjeeling to which he was sent as a boarder. The School was run by an Irish nun for European children and the medium of instruction was English. Not a minute was allotted to teaching any Indian language! Thus, Aurobindo and his brothers had only English children as companions and English as the language of communication both in the boarding house and in school. It is no wonder that Aurobindo had to learn Bengali, his mother-tongue, almost entirely afresh after his return from England to Baroda in 1893. He managed to have only a smattering of it earlier when he was appointed as probationer after passing the I.C.S. examination.

Unfortunately, even at this time Swarnalata was subject to hysterical attacks which sometimes made her violent. The children used to spend the vacations either at Khulna or at Deogarh with their maternal grandfather. Aurobindo remembered hardly anything of those days. But one dream he had at Darjeeling, which he did remember, is significant. One night while asleep, a mass of darkness came rapidly towards him, encircled him and entered into him. While in England, this experience repeated itself sometimes and was only dispelled when he returned to India in 1893. He then had quite another experience of infinite calm which stayed with him for a long time.

The children had been at school for barely two years, when in 1879 their parents took them along with their

younger sister Sarojini to England for education. Dr. Krishnadhan seemed to concentrate on giving to his children training that would make them products of the best kind of English education, without giving the least insight into Indian life and culture. It was during this stay in England that Barindra, Aurobindo's youngest brother, was born to Swarnalata. His lawyers sought to use the fact of his British birth as a point of vantage later at his trial in the Alipore Bomb Case in 1908.

Aurobindo's two elder brothers were entered at the Manchester Grammar School, while he who was hardly seven, was entrusted to the parental care of a clergyman and his wife, Mr. and Mrs. Drewett. Mr. Drewett happened to be a Latin scholar and found in the young Indian a very willing and intelligent student. As all tuition was given at home, the young scholar found time to read the Bible, and Shakespeare, Shelly and Keats among other authors. He had then no inclination either towards religion or philosophy. The Drewetts were instructed that the child was not to meet Indians and was not to be acquainted with Indian culture and affairs! A mild attempt was made by Mrs. Drewett to have Aurobindo baptised as a Christian, but her husband discouraged it. For a time, Aurobindo was known as Aurobindo Acroyd Ghose as he was in the charge of a teacher by name Mr. Acroyd! But later, Aurobindo dropped it in disgust, although his father had liked it very much.

Aurobindo learnt Latin quickly and progressed very rapidly. When after the departure of the Drewetts to Australia in 1885, he was entered at St. Paul's School in London, the Head Master there was surprised at the precocity of the child and very lovingly began to teach him Greek on his own initiative. His progress in that great language was also astonishing. That made his promotion to higher classes easy as well as quick.

From the record of progress that Aurobindo made at school, especially in mastering English, Latin and Greek at so young an age, it is obvious that he was extraordinarily intelligent and his capacity for learning languages very marked. Though not much mention is made of the qualities of his heart and of his character, it is known that he was very gentle and loving and seldom assertive or aggressive. His was more a retiring and reserved temperament than one given to too much social mixing and gaiety. He was a sober scholar and one absorbed in the world of ideas and ideals. To describe him as a contemplative at that age may seem to be too much of an exaggeration, but it is definite that his tendencies lay that way. It should be noted in this connection, that at about the age of thirteen he suddenly felt an inner urge to shed all selfishness and his attempts at self-sacrifice date from this early age.

While under the fostering care of the Drewetts in Manchester and later while at St. Paul's in London, the child-scholar distinguished himself by his superior intellectual ability and gentle, amiable character. On the strength of these natural endowments, at the end of his four years' stay at St. Paul's in 1889 at the tender age of seventeen, he was successful in securing a senior classical scholarship of King's College, Cambridge. Its value was £ 80 per annum. Immediately after his entry, his talents were discovered by Oscar Browning, then a noted figure at the University.

While in Manchester and during his early years at St. Paul's, we have seen that Aurobindo gave special attention to the study of Classics and the English language. But later, when he had become quite confident about his class studies, he extended the scope of his reading to literature and other general subjects, and bestowed particular care on reading English and French literature and the whole history of Europe. He also devoted some time to the study of Italian

and German. But what is more important and remarkable is that he spent a great deal of time in composing poetry when only fourteen. His "Hecuba" seems to have been admired very much by Lawrence Binyon.

In spite of this diversion from school and college studies, however, he won all the prizes for the year in King's College for Greek and Latin verse. This in itself speaks for the ease with which he handled classical languages even at that age, and while in a distant British university. This is proof, if proof is wanted, of his extreme precocity as well as of his ability to enter into the spirit of the ancient languages of Europe. This then was the high level of special proficiency he gained in Greek and Latin. Let us now see how he fared with his regular and prescribed course of studies.

He passed with a first class distinction, the First Part of the Tripos at King's College. The degree of B.A. is normally given after passing this First Part, but only if the examination is taken in the third year. In Aurobindo's case, however, he had only two years at his disposal after joining the college, he therefore saw to it that he passed the examination. In such a case to qualify for the degree, the student has to appear for the Second Part of the Tripos in the fourth year. Another way to obtain the degree is by making application for it. But obviously Aurobindo did not care to do this as he had no intention of pursuing an academic career at the University, and outside such a career, degrees have little value in England.

At the instance of his father and without the help of a tutor, he passed with distinction the open competition for the Indian Civil Service. But he had not paid any attention to riding and as a result, failed in the first test. A second chance is given often enough, especially when the student is otherwise brilliant. This distinguished student would certainly have been given a chance to try again. But obvi-

ously he did not care to. When he came to know the result, he informed Benoy, his brother, and together they played cards and smoked away the failure. Manmohan took the failure seriously and rebuked them for being so frivolous. Though the father had marked his son for a career in the I.C.S., Aurobindo does not seem to have cared much for the idea. In fact, the presumption is that he deliberately avoided passing the riding test so that he might avoid the obligation of pursuing the official career! He was destined to fulfil quite a different mission. Presumably, it was the call of that mission which cleared his path of all impediments.

Thus in 1893, at the age of twenty-one, so far as his studies and intellectual equipment were concerned, he had not only mastered the English language but also Latin and Greek, the two richest classical languages of Europe. He was however, still almost a stranger to his mother-tongue and to all other Indian languages. He had made fair acquaintance with the then most important European languages, French, Italian, and German. His command of English and classical languages was extraordinary. He was composing in English fairly good poetry and had proved to his teachers that he could compose with ease in Greek and Latin. He had passed the Tripos with distinction and, with the exception of riding, had done remarkably well in the I.C.S. competitive examination. His student-life was first spent as a boarder at a convent school in Darjeeling in the midst of the most beautiful Himalayan surroundings and in the company of British children. Later, he was for a number of years under the parental care of the Drewetts in Manchester. He was then entered at St. Paul's in London and finally at King's College, Cambridge. Out of the twenty-one years of his life, he had spent fourteen in England, some in an English household and others in British boarding houses. Out of the seven earlier years he had lived in India, two were

spent in a convent school! Thus the most impressionable years of Aurobindo's early life were lived either in England or in English surroundings in India. Furthermore, during these years, he was engaged in studying English or the classics or European languages. He had not yet begun to study any philosophy, Greek or German or Indian. He had read only Plato's Republic and Symposium. His study of Heraclitus and Sanskrit as well as of many other subjects was subsequent to his return to India. Whenever he was at his father's, he was surrounded by an atmosphere which was suffused with a love of everything British and European. As we have seen, there was no love lost between his father and things Indian. It was out of this environment or perhaps as a strong reaction to it, that a most powerful and eloquent voice "in defence of Indian culture" issued forth from Aurobindo in later years. But he was singularly free from any dislike for the West. On the contrary, he was full of love and appreciation for certain aspects of western culture and civilization. His was the approach of a fully mature man of catholic sympathies and comprehensive outlook. It was not merely the voice of an advocate of the East but it was of one who while upholding the East, pleaded in the best interests of humanity itself, for an integral synthesis of the East and the West. He loved the spiritual East but equally admired the vital West. In his eyes, matter and materialism were but aspects of the Spirit itself. He believed that real fulfilment and perfection of man lay in the scientific development of a real evolutionary spirituality which would not only revolutionize the spiritual outlook and inner life but also transform outer life and material existence.

Apart from Aurobindo's academic and other studies, it is interesting to peep into the working of his mind and to note some incidents and trends of thought which influenced him during his stay in England. They are mostly to be deduced

from the kind of life he led, from his poems and other writings, and from his activities at that time.

Though his father cannot be said to have been a religious man in the ordinary sense of the term, we have seen that he was truly religious in another sense. In addition to serving his patients he would often spend all his money on them. He carried this to such extreme that on occasions, he was unable to send regular remittances to his children in England. Sometimes this resulted in great hardship to Aurobindo and his brothers and gave them a good foretaste of poverty and want. But he would always suffer in silence rather than complain about his plight. He and his brothers often had no winter overcoats and sometimes had to go without regular meals. They had to satisfy their hunger on a piece of bacon, tea, and a few crumbs of bread! Aurobindo's brother at one time took a part-time job out of sheer necessity.

It has already been seen that Aurobindo wrote verses and poetry from his early childhood. This tendency was not restricted to writing only in English but included Latin and Greek. He continued to be a stranger to Indian languages, literature, and imagery till he returned to Baroda. It is therefore natural that we find in his early poems, classical names from Greek and Roman mythology and the use of classical imagery. These poems were published after he had settled down in Baroda. They reveal not only an uncanny poetic skill and mastery of the English language, phrase, and imagery but also a developing skill in the technique of poetry. Though his muse began her career as a tiny rivulet, she later developed and expanded until Aurobindo was inspired to write the grand and imposing epic of "Savitri". This great epic of his inner life which he began writing in Baroda and ended only on the eve of his passing away, is rich and replete not merely with English imagery of the earlier

days but also with the resplendent and pregnant phrase so characteristic of Indian imagination and of Sanskrit imagery. Seldom has the English language been given a task heavier than in "Savitri", where the unusual and unique experiences of a great spiritual adventurer have been expressed through an imagery with which Sanskrit alone has been familiar for ages.

We already know that the Ghose household had under its roof two influences, one wholly Indian from the mother Swarnalata, and another European, from the father, Dr. Krishnadhan. The meek and docile mother could not and did not assert herself and ultimately, the children had been removed from Indian environment and sent away to England for education.

This does not mean that Dr. Krishnadhan was not a lover of his country, India. On the contrary, he believed that the salvation of his country would come about through the initiation and importation of western methods and way of life. His letters to his sons in England are evidence of his love for India's good. They are full of complaints in strong language against the injustice, inelasticity, and the "heartlessness," as Dr. Krishnadhan put it, of the British Government in India. Sometimes he sent the newspaper "Bengalee" with marked passages, to his sons, which bore out the accusations that he laid at the door of the government. These may perhaps have acted as the first lessons in patriotism to his sons, paradoxically enough given by a father who was himself denationalized and who believed in "denationalizing" his sons! Time takes its own revenges and in a strange way. It was quite plain that Dr. Krishnadhan's admiration for the English way of life could not prevent him from developing a strong resentment against the British system of administration, which was based on ruthless exploitation of India. This feeling developed in the

father to such an extent that he made it a point to transmit it to his sons. Aurobindo's firm decision to serve his country's cause dates as early as when he was hardly fifteen.

The seeds of patriotism were thus sown in the mind of Aurobindo at a very impressionable age. At Cambridge he became secretary of the Indian Majlis, first established there in 1891, and often took part in the debates. K. G. Deshpande, Hari Singh Gour, Beachcroft, Felix De Souza and Pereira were some of his colleagues at Cambridge. In his speeches he dealt with the British imperialistic hold on India, sometimes in no mild or measured terms. Some of his statements could easily be characterized as revolutionary. It is said that these speeches earned for him a black mark by the India Office and were responsible in no small measure for his not being encouraged to enter the I.C.S., and that his failure to pass the riding test was used as an excuse. Aurobindo and his brothers almost instinctively found themselves among a group of fiery young men in England who openly avowed their dislike and dissatisfaction with the liberal and moderate views of leaders like Dadabhai Naoroji. These ardent youths did not stop merely at expressing their resentment in words. During the last days of their stay, some who thought in extremist terms, which meant action, met in London and formed a secret society known as the "Lotus and Dagger!". This was the first attempt of its kind by Indians in England. Aurobindo joined it. Each one of the members took a pledge to adopt some measure which would help towards ending foreign rule in India. The society, however, did not become operative, though some of its members, notably Aurobindo, kept their vow and acted upon it later in life.

Though almost from his infancy, Aurobindo had been weaned from Indian languages and culture, and though very strong denationalizing forces played upon him throughout his student days in India as well as in England, the

healthy and vigorous seeds of patriotism, sown and nourished by his father's letters from India, steadily grew in his mind. It was this growing patriotism which made him increasingly intolerant of the moderate school of Indian politicians. It was this which laid the foundation for an aggressive nationalism and created an intense hunger for immediate and extreme action against the standing insult of foreign rule.

During his fourteen years' stay in England, he fully imbibed and developed deep love for the English language and its poetry. But his stay did not succeed in creating any love for England or for England's political ways. On the other hand, he had great admiration for Ireland, the Irish struggle for freedom, and its hero Parnell. When the latter died in 1891 he wrote a eulogy on him. Of all European countries, he had greater attachment to France, though he had neither any occasion to visit it nor to live in it. It was his admiration for the French Revolution and for the Irish patriots, together with his passion for Indian freedom which urged him to join the "Lotus and Dagger" society. It was an indication of the way he would follow on his return to India.

Now that he had successfully contrived to disqualify himself in the I.C.S. examination, he must have been secretly happy that he was not now to be a part of the "British steel frame" in India. After completing his studies at the University, he thought of returning to India, a thought which attracted him like a magnet in the innermost recesses of his heart. He was drawn to India by a natural attraction to Indian culture and ways of life and by a temperamental feeling and preference for all that was Indian. The call of Sarasvati from her "lotus-heaven", the call of "the regions of eternal snow", the call of the Ganges, was there and he soon made preparations for coming home. The next thirteen years of his life, from 1893 to 1906, which may be said to

be the years of his preliminary Sadhana for his future spirituo-political life, were bound principally with an academic career in Baroda State.

It was most unfortunate that his father did not live to see his successful son return home. Almost on the eve of his return, Dr. Krishnadhan wrote to his brother-in-law in very glowing terms about Aurobindo. He was proud of his sons and especially of "Auro" as he was fondly called. But by some tragic mistake, he was wrongly informed by his bankers, Grindlay & Sons, that his son had already sailed and that the ship had an accident and sunk off Lisbon. The poor old man died of heart-failure with the name of Aurobindo on his lips. In actual fact, Aurobindo sailed by the "Carthage", a steamer that left London later and arrived safely in Bombay in February 1893.

The late Sayaji Rao Gaekwar of Baroda, was well-known for choosing his employees with great care and discretion. This was, in fact, the secret of the progress of his State. When he first came to know through Mr. James Cotton, brother of Sir Henry Cotton, that a talented and ardent young man named Aurobindo was willing to join him, he jumped at the idea. The matter was settled after an interview with the Maharajah, who was then in England. Thus the young Aurobindo joined the Baroda State Service and sailed for India. Then began another epoch in the life and development of Sri Aurobindo.

CHAPTER IV

THE GREAT PREPARATION

After returning to India in 1893, he went first to see his mother in Rohini, a village four miles from Deoghar. She was staying there with Barindra. Unfortunately she had

an attack of hysteria and did not immediately recognize Aurobindo. She said that "Auro" had the mark of a cut on his hand. It was only when that was revealed to her that she began to show any sign of recognition. She was called "Pagli Ma". Few dared to go near her as she would sometimes rush brandishing a dagger! Aurobindo sent money to her and also to his sister Sarojini for her education at Bankipore. His elder brother seemed to be indifferent in this matter. Barindra after some adventures in running a tea shop on a paltry sum of Rs. 900 in Patna, suddenly joined him in 1901 in Baroda, and from that time attached himself to his elder brother and accepted his guidance in all matters. Barindra occasionally went to stay with his mother. He had another small house close to Raidih level-crossing on the E.I. Rly. main line for carrying out bomb experiments and for arms dump. Bombs were tested in the Digharia hills.

While Barindra was staying in Baroda he fell a prey in 1904 to malignant fever. He went out into some deep forest in the Baroda State, to find a suitable place for founding a "Bhavani Mandir" to train youths. He caught this dangerous fever there. It did not yield to any ordinary treatment. As if by accident, a Naga Sannyasi who came to Aurobindo cured him by giving a cup of water to drink which he crossed by a knife charged with Mantra. He gave to Aurobindo also some Mantra and performed a Yajna. But this was all for political power and victory and not for Yoga or spiritual Sadhana.

Sri Aurobindo completed all his academic studies while in England, and after returning to India, settled down in Baroda in 1893. But it was neither a real end to his studies nor a final settling down in a permanent and secure job. In fact, along with other preoccupations, this was a starting point for new studies regarding everything Indian and Eastern. The study of Indian languages, history, and culture

attracted him first. He was absorbed in them all the time he was in Baroda. His life there was one great preparation, first for a surprisingly brief yet extraordinarily brilliant patriotic career and subsequently for his Yoga in Pondicherry. It should be noted, however, that his patriotism was not of the usual type but was grounded in spirituality, and his career during 1906-1910 must be characterized more as spirituo-political rather than merely political in the ordinary sense. The next thirteen years, before he actually took to active and open politics, may be said to have been utilized intensely for laying the foundations of his overall integral spiritual outlook on life, of the burning patriotism which was impatient of foreign domination in any shape or form, of the extreme but firm political policies he was to adopt, and of the deep-rooted love of his people and their culture.

So far, Aurobindo's life had been almost untouched by Indian or Oriental influences. The English language and western civilization had a "tabula rasa" to work upon all the time. And that was his father's ambition, which, one can say, had been completely fulfilled. Except for the fragmentary knowledge of Bengali he had acquired after the I.C.S. examination in England, Aurobindo did not know any Indian language, much less anything of Indian life and culture. And who was his teacher in Bengali? One Mr. Towers who was called Pandit. He was so great a Pandit in Bengali that he understood only the Bengali used by Vidyasagar in "Bodhodaya". When confronted with the Bengali of Bankim, he exclaimed, that is not Bengali! His education in England, however, had given him a very good grounding in western thought, western life, and western civilization. He was as familiar with everything western as any accomplished European intellectual of his time. This very familiarity, however, revealed to his great penetrating insight the defects from which that civilization was suffering. While he highly valued

and praised the scientific method and approach, the power of organisation, the importance of discipline, the massive and intricate structure of the civilization of the West, he was deeply conscious of the want of the informing spirit, of the soul, of the higher approach that he felt necessary, if humanity was to take the next leap in evolution. He was always sympathetic, accommodative, and comprehensive in his outlook and therefore he never rejected or repudiated anything western. His settling for the time being in Baroda with this background gave him the required opportunity to study the East and specially India. It was this study which facilitated the presentation by him later of a synthetic view which alone can enable people to value both the East and the West in the right perspective.

Baroda was the pretty capital of a small Indian State in Gujarat which could boast of a very progressive prince in the person of Maharajah Sayaji Rao Gaekwar. Usually the princes were but puppets, and in all States the cramping and crushing suzerainty of the British made itself felt through the Resident, a high officer of the Crown. In spite of this damping atmosphere, however, there were some princes, though few and far between, who loved their subjects and tried to do some good to them. Sayaji Rao was certainly one of such enlightened and bold princes. He was himself well-educated and widely travelled. He believed in good administration as well as in educating his subjects. He initiated a number of reforms, advanced the cause of education, started a library movement, established a technical institution, and worked for the advance of women and the backward classes. He knew the value of good and efficient men. He appreciated the importance of foreign education and was always careful in choosing his Diwans. It was on account of this progressive outlook that he decided to take Aurobindo into the Baroda State Service. Aurobindo found

his new surroundings quite congenial for his studies and engaged himself in the task of building up a vast store of knowledge. The accumulation of knowledge (Jnān-sanchaya) seemed then to be the sole aim of his life, says Dinendrakumar in his Bengali book, "Aurobindo Prasanga".

So far as his official career in the Baroda State Service was concerned, he began on a salary of Rs. 200/- per month and worked as a probationer in the Revenue Settlement Department, and then for some time in the Stamps and Revenue Department. He went through the secretariat work also and spent some time in writing despatches and reports. But he gradually gravitated towards educational work and teaching, where, undoubtedly, he felt more at home. He began first as a lecturer in French at the college but was soon appointed as Professor of English. When he left for Calcutta in 1906 he was the Vice-Principal of Baroda College. His salary was then Rs. 750/- per month. The Maharajah's great regard and admiration for him was evident from the fact that he was often informally entrusted with drafting very important confidential State communications. He was sometimes looked upon as a prospective Diwan. But his retiring temperament, his somewhat shy and reserved nature, and the want of certain other special qualifications necessary for an obedient and successful courtier, came in the way of his advance along that line. But he never pined after that way of life. He even avoided State dinners, attending them only when he had the prospect of getting through some particular business. After a time, the Maharajah recognized the limitations of his exceptionally brilliant, intelligent, and efficient officer and allowed him to have his own way and to pursue his academic bent undisturbed. Aurobindo was very popular with his students and colleagues. Until he left for a wider field and for a more

turbulent and stormy atmosphere, he enjoyed their warmth of feeling and tenderness of affection.

While he was pursuing in a normal manner the official career described above, he was also intently following the innate bent of his inner nature, his Swabhava, his Swadharma. It can be described as a relentless search after the very Soul of things. He was never satisfied with appearances, with names and forms, with manifestations. He would always try to go to the root of the matter in everything. He had a clear and definite picture of the very source and tap-root of western civilization and all that it stood for. Now he wanted to delve deep into the vast expanse of Indian life and its ancient but continuous culture and discover for himself the eternal inspiration that kept it ever alive and afresh. He felt proud that India could boast of a great cultural heritage but deplored sorely the shameful political slavery to which she was subject. Now that he was in India, he began to explore the deeper causes of India's weakness which had dragged her into the mire. He was conscious of the appalling poverty of India's miserable millions and he was anxious to find out the economic and other causes that lay at the root. He realized that the dust of ages had settled down on numerous social and other evils in Indian life and he wanted to know where to apply the lever. But above all, his search was for the Self of all selves, for the One and Indivisible Reality which pervaded and informed everything. This search superseded all others and sometimes it seemed that he had abandoned other pursuits. But it was never so. His was an encircling and multi-prolonged attack and he knew that whatever his pursuit, it would lead him to the central Truth, provided it was sincere, intense, and determined. Once that Truth was known, all else was known (Yasmin Vijnāte Sarvamidam Vijnātam Bhavati). Thus the stream of his life flowed in a double current, one which was obvious,

visible to the eye and which assumed the shape and form of an official career and varied literary and other activities. The other current was inner, deeper, and stronger. It moved fast to its goal certainly and surely, unseen and unknown to others, but in fact, carrying the real Aurobindo on its bosom all the time, unmistakably to the status of a Yogēshwar (the lord of Yoga).

This great quest should not be mistaken for mere intellectual hunger to know the why and wherefor of things. He sought the Truth with his whole being, with whatever he was worth. It was not the search of the philosopher for a mere rational theory of the universe. It was rather the hunger of the mystic for his "Beloved", the search of the Nara (son of man) for the Nārāyana. Nor was it solely for individual salvation and Nirvana but as was later unfolded, it was for a general spiritual advance of humanity, for the next step in evolution, for the divinisation of human life on earth.

It is in this perspective that we have to view his great preparation. It is true that in addition to official duties, the next thirteen years of his life were full of a number of other activities. But the running, powerful undercurrent was spiritual Sadhana. Even his politics and patriotism were but forms of Sadhana. It required some time before this emphasis became quite pronounced, but long before he took to actual politics, the spiritual motive had established its dominance in his mind and his patriotism as well as politics were permeated with a highly spiritual outlook. To omit spirituality from Aurobindo's thought and life would be to miss the very essence of his being.

Let us now survey his pursuits and activities in Baroda. His life there consisted of State service, intense study, political activity of a secret character, Sadhana which later became very pronounced, and family life. In the beginning,

he devoted much of his time to the study of Indian languages, including Sanskrit. He showed great aptitude for mastering them. He started with Bengali, with which he was only slightly acquainted. Mostly he taught himself, though in 1898 Dinendrakumar was invited to assist him as a companion, especially in the matter of conversation, correct pronunciation, current idiom, and literature. It is obvious that two Bengali writers who impressed him very much were Michael Madhusudan Dutt, the pioneer in modern Bengali poetry, and Bankim Chandra, the great Bengali novelist and prose writer. A tribute paid to Dutt includes the couplet :

“Poet, who first with skill inspired did teach
Greatness to our divine Bengali speech....”

He was equally charmed with the writings of Bankim, the master of prose:—

“He sowed the desert with ruddy-hearted rose,
The sweetest voice that ever spoke in prose.”

He also wrote as early as 1894 in the “Indu Prakash”, an Anglo-Marathi Journal of Bombay, articles on Bankim’s work. This journal advocated the views of the Moderate Party. With one year’s assistance from Dinendrakumar, he mastered the Bengali language in 1898-99. Later in 1909, he conducted a Bengali weekly, “Dharma”, in which most of the articles were written by himself. But at the same time it must be said, that his command over English always far surpassed that over Bengali. And he never thought of addressing a public meeting in Bengali!

The next language to be mastered was Sanskrit. Obviously, knowledge of this great and ancient language was very important from the point of view of having access to the original source of Indian thought, philosophy and culture. His study of Sanskrit was deep and continuous. The im-

pression made on him by the treasures available in the oldest and richest of languages was abiding. The Upanishads and the Gitā served both as texts and as guides to him in spiritual matters. When he wrote on subjects concerning Indian thought and basic concepts, expressions, quotations, single important words of Sanskrit leapt to the tip of his pen almost without his knowing. He was conscious of the fact that the rich connotation of certain words in Sanskrit, such as Kṛitu, Ritam, Swabhāva, Swadharma, etc., cannot be conveyed by English words in translation. He made it a point to clarify such pregnant expressions with elaborate explanations. His acquaintance with Sanskrit was not restricted to religious or philosophical texts. He was equally at home with Kalidāsa, Bhavabhūti, the Rāmāyana, the Mahābhārata as with the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Gitā, and the Manusmṛiti. His appreciation and defence of Indian cultural thought in its various manifestations was neither second-hand nor by proxy. It sprang from his direct knowledge of what the great Rishis and Munis and Sāhitis have written from inspiration and from intuitive experience. His highly original interpretation of many of the Riks, the Ishāvāsyā, and the Gitā not only speaks for his deep scholarship but also for his ability to penetrate to the core of past thought and his capacity to recapture its spirit in vivid and incisive English phraseology.

Two other Indian languages with which he had to acquaint himself were Marāṭhi and Gujarāṭi, both of which were officially recognized by the State of Baroda. The State territory lay wholly in the Gujarati-speaking area but the ruling dynasty was Marathi-speaking. Hence the almost equal status of both languages in the State. It is not very evident from any of his writings that Aurobindo studied either language very deeply or extensively. His reference to writers in those languages is very casual.

His study of other languages, Greek and French for instance, had not abated. His library was full of books in more than half a dozen European languages. Greek and German philosophy continued to be studied as well as Indian. In fact, there was no subject in which he was not interested or about which he did not read and think. Two book shops in Bombay had standing orders to acquaint him promptly with new titles. He read Homer, Dante, and Horace as avidly as English and Sanskrit poets. With all his foreign studies, it is surprising that Aurobindo was influenced by them the least in fundamentals.

While he continued his extensive studies, he also devoted some time to writing and to publication. Some of the poems written while he was in England were now published for the first time. "Songs of Myrtilla" was his first publication. He also wrote a number of poems on Indian themes. Gradually the classical Greek and Latin flavour that had once suffused his literary productions evaporated. His writings now drew inspiration from the Sanskrit classics. The rich tropical atmosphere of India lent to him the exuberant imagery with which Sanskrit and other Indian literature is so full.

His writings and publications, however, were not restricted to books alone. Far more important were the articles he contributed (August 1893 to February 1894) to the "Indu Prakash" of Bombay, under the title "New Lamps for Old". They reflected very vividly his political opinions. He laid great emphasis on self-help, on sincerity, on building up inner strength, and on character. He condemned the moderate leadership then obtaining and wrote that it was like the blind leading the blind. It was no wonder that a mind fully alive to the iniquity of India's slavery, a mind stimulated to think seriously of the wrongs of British rule, a mind that had become impatient of the moderate school of politics, and a mind that had been driven to take a vow

to end British rule, now preached extreme patriotism in pungent and cutting phrase with all the rhetoric that a young scholar could command. His being in service, however, prevented him from openly acknowledging his writings and the publication of the articles, was anonymous. He wrote them at the request of a close friend and Cambridge class-mate, Keshavrao G. Deshpande, who was then in charge of the "Indu Prakash".

These first articles of a fiery patriot, created quite a stir and it is said that M. G. Ranade advised the proprietor of the "Indu Prakash" to discontinue them lest the government should pounce upon the journal and ban it from circulation. A hint from the proprietor was conveyed through the editor of the journal, and Aurobindo had to discontinue the series! Another set of articles written by him later in 1894 on Bankim, Tilak, and Dayanand reflected his thoughts on these three great personalities who, each in his own way, had contributed to the reawakening of slumbering India. Bankim gave to Bengal a polished prose style and taught the people to look upon India as their Mother. The immortal song "Bande Mataram", which forms part of his famous Bengali novel "Anand Math", became at first in the Swadeshi days, the symbol and clarion call of nationalism. It spread throughout India and was on the lips of all as the national song. Today it shares with "Jana-Gana-Mana" of Rabindranath, the honour of being our National Anthem.

If his study of Indian languages and the publication of literary productions give us a picture of his progress in the field of literature and of culture, his contributions to the "Indu Prakash" acquaint us fairly well with his patriotic and political ideas. He was in those days a voracious reader. It is said that he not only had books posted to him, but more often they came by the crate. He sat at an ordinary kerosene lamp reading deep into the night and rose late.

After morning tea, he would again read and write till ten o'clock and then take his bath. He would often continue to read papers during meals when a cigar also would be his companion.

To speak of his patriotism first, he had already developed a strongly pro-Indian and anti-foreign bias. In Baroda, he was more often seen in simple Indian dress. His love of things Indian was genuine and deepened with the passage of time and with the progress of his Indian studies. But his patriotism was not based merely on economic and political motives. He would not have been satisfied for instance, if India had become only politically free and economically rich. His patriotism never descended even by mistake to the aggressive type of expansive nationalism that hankers after conquest in the name of culture or hungers after the lands of others in the name of "living space". It never lost the perspective of an international setting and of a world organized as a single unit through peace, goodwill, and cooperation for the progress of humanity. His love of India ultimately led him to the "Ideal of Human Unity", which clearly shows the broader hidden basis of his nascent love of his own land and people. His patriotism was apiece with the Indian renaissance that was struggling hard to find its ancient soul and express it in new terms and with vigour as was required by the modern age. Another important feature was that it was almost religious in essence and highly spiritual in content. To him India was not merely a geographical expression or a political and economic entity. It was not only a rich and resplendent land of great rivers and mighty mountains and an ancient people with an imposing culture. India was to him a Mother to be revered and a Goddess to be worshipped. Contemplation of her, and her service gave him the same thrill and the same deep experience that one enjoys while in deep meditation. India was

to him the very embodiment of a great spiritual message, the fountainhead of the wisdom of the spirit, the home of rich and invaluable inner experiences.

A number of patriotic spirits had expressed their love of India in different ways since the middle of the nineteenth century. Many of them had had no occasion to come into direct conflict with the British, but their love of India and the Indian people was not less genuine. Along with social and religious reform, they had a strong desire for India's freedom and expressed this desire in terms which were far from ambiguous when occasion arose. Of Raja Ram Mohan, the earliest of the giants, it was said, "He would be free or not be at all Love of freedom was perhaps the strongest passion of his soul" (William Adam, Baptist missionary). If patriotism means love of India, of Indian people, of Indian way of life, together with a strong desire for the political freedom of India, then Raja Ram Mohan, Vivekananda, Swami Dayananda were certainly great patriots. They valued the freedom of India as much as those who actually fought in the political field, though their main tasks lay in fields other than those of politics. All shared in evoking love of India in the hearts of the young and old of their own generation. It is no wonder that Aurobindo was impressed so much by these patriots who had shown such genuine love for India and rendered selfless service in one field or another. His great admiration for Bankim, for instance, is expressed in very high terms. To him he was not only a prophet of Indian cultural renaissance, but "a seer and a nation-builder" and one of "the makers of modern India".

Aurobindo's utterances in the Indian Majlis at Cambridge, while still in adolescence, his joining the "Lotus and Dagger" group in London and his writings in the "Indu Prakash", reveal to us unmistakably his political ideas and

ideals. Love of one's country has to take some concrete shape before it can become politically effective. It is obvious that his mind was definitely heading towards the ideal of Swaraj or full independence. He defined it later in 1909 in one of his speeches. He said, "Our ideal of Swaraj involves no hatred of any other nation nor of the administration which is now established by law in this country. We find a bureaucratic administration, we wish to make it democratic; we find an alien government, we wish to make it indigenous; we find a foreign control, we wish to render it Indian. They lie who say that this aspiration necessitates hatred and violence. Our ideal of patriotism proceeds on the basis of love and brotherhood and it looks beyond the unity of the nation and envisages the ultimate unity of mankind. But it is a unity of brothers and free men that we seek, not the unity of master and serf, of the devourer and devoured." The first item on his programme was freedom, unadulterated freedom. He was therefore, quite averse to all other lesser and procrastinating political policies. It is true that political extremism, which ultimately emerged during the Swadeshi movement in 1906 in the form of a demand for immediate Swaraj, had not yet taken birth, except in the form of impatient and strong utterances and writings of ardent spirits like B. G. Tilak. There was an intense desire for freedom but no organised policy or concrete programme had yet taken shape in the minds of patriots. They had definite sympathies with those who were engaged in a programme to collect arms and train youth for the purpose of an ultimate armed revolution. It was looked upon as complementary but it was a very long-range programme of something like thirty years. Attempts at organization were, moreover, on a very small scale. In the absence of an active political programme, it was natural that persons of the persuasion of Aurobindo should bide their time. He tried to express his views through

the columns of a newspaper but found that the editor was not willing to take risks, so he returned to his shell. His writing on Tilak reveals how his mind was running and how he admired the robust nationalism of the young Maratha patriot who was the first in India to suffer for writing sedition.

Before going to the development of Aurobindo's spirituality and his practice of Yoga, we should first take count of the contacts he had in Baroda, his marriage with Mrinalini, and the kind of social life he led.

Apart from official circles in which Aurobindo had to move, there were a few persons with whom he was closely associated during this period.

6460 One was K. G. Deshpande, who had been a classmate at Cambridge, and was then editor of the "Indu Prakash" of Bombay. But his most intimate friend was Lieutenant Madhavrao Jadhav, who helped him in everything even after his departure to Calcutta for political work. Aurobindo lived with him in Baroda for years. During his thirteen years of stay, he lived sometimes in one and sometimes in another of four or five houses. Some other friends were Khaserao Jadhav, Phadke and Mangesh Kolaskar. His life was always simple to the point of being uncomfortable. He used an iron cot and even in winter went without quilts. He was indifferent to his surroundings, as is evident from the houses he chose to live in, the type of servants that were engaged, and the way he suffered equally heat and cold without concern. His taste for food was quite simple. Gujarathi food was too fat and Maratha food too hot for him. He liked Tilak's spartan meals, as he called them. He ate meat or fish only once a day. He preferred bread to rice.

Socially speaking, the most important thing that happened to Aurobindo while in Baroda was his marriage in April 1901 with Mrinalini, a young and beautiful girl, who

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was destined to suffer for marrying a genius. She was the daughter of Bhupalchandra of Jessore who had settled in Ranchi. She had rarely the privilege of living with her husband for long, though their relations were most cordial and full of affection from the beginning to the end. Aurobindo, who was later highly conscious of his great destiny, wrote to her often in detail and tried to prepare her mind for a life other than that of a mere housewife. She was a high-souled woman of great devotion and piety and by her dignity made suffering itself a step towards a higher life. He suffered her to live with him from time to time, but after leaving Baroda, his life was so full of activity that his wife and sister Sarojini lived alone for days and months at a time and once for a full year while he was in Alipore jail. After his departure to Pondicherry in 1910, there was no question of her visiting him, as he then plunged into even deeper Yoga which called for utter seclusion and austere continence. He gave permission, however, for her to visit Pondicherry in 1918, but while she was making the journey she fell ill in Calcutta and died after a severe attack of influenza. Her brother, Dr. Sisir Kumar, now (1954) a medical practitioner in Ranchi, testifies to the fact that she always bore the separation well and with satisfaction, as she realized that although she was high in the estimation of her husband, she would not be helping him in his way of life by insisting on his continuous company, as any devoted wife would normally have done.

Regarding Aurobindo's marriage, one or two things are worth noting. He had many other offers before marrying Mrinalini. The question of Prāyaschitta (expiation) also came up. Like his father, he too refused it, since he saw no sin in having gone and lived in England. Ultimately however a clever priest absolved him on payment of some Daxina! But generally, Aurobindo adopted a very reverent attitude

towards other rituals in the ceremony. He took them quite seriously. Distinguished visitors such as Sir and Lady Jagadish Bose and Lord Sinha were present. After his marriage, on 28th May, 1901 he went with his wife and sister to Nainital for a few days. It can be said that what little family life Aurobindo lived, began with his marriage and ended in 1910 with his departure for Chandranagore and then for Pondicherry. Short as was the period, it was never continuous or steady and was full of long breaks.

After marriage, Aurobindo ran a house spasmodically but his wife often stayed at Deoghar. At times he even failed to send money for her expenses. He was never careful about his own expenditure, though it cannot be said that he sent money for improper purposes. Dinendrakumar, who was with him for a year in 1898-99, says that he lived alone and knew no luxury, but not a pie was left at the end of the month. He is not an earthly being, writes Dinendrakumar, he is "a strayed god". He described him as one with a slightly pock-marked face, long hair, and dreamy eyes. Instead of fashionable wear, he wore a simple "mirjai" (kudta) of Indian mill-cloth. He adds that he had practically no desires, shunned all limelight, talked little, was self-controlled and had made study his life's ambition.

Viewed from a historical standpoint, what was most significant and important in the life of Aurobindo in Baroda was his grounding in spirituality and initiation into Yoga. I shall not go into detail here of his Sadhana as that will be done when writing later of his spiritual life. Here I shall only touch the subject to the extent required for telling the story of his activities in Baroda.

When one glances at the books and general literature he read in early days and at his poetry and other literary efforts, one is inclined to think that it was the Muses he loved best and that it was aesthetics and the Goddess of Beauty

that lured him most. Romesh Chandra Dutt, who met Aurobindo in 1899 and saw his translations of Ramayana and Mahabharata, testified to the high quality of the effort and said, he would never have made the attempt himself, if he had known that Aurobindo was already doing so. At the beginning of his career, he had not shown much inclination for either philosophy or metaphysics. Both subjects seemed to him to be dry and intellectual. He hankered after the flesh of living and stirring ideas. Mere skeletons and theories did not thrill him with emotion. He knew as much of philosophy as a good literary man should, but did not at that time pursue it as a subject. His acquaintance with the work of philosophers and metaphysicians, western as well as eastern, was meagre in those days.

The writings of Vivekananda made a strong impression upon him, although the influence of Ramakrishna was far more profound and abiding. It can be said with some truth that it was from these two great souls that Aurobindo received his first glimpse of spirituality and of the great message of India. Vivekananda, after his return to India from the Parliament of Religions in Chicago, addressed a Madras audience on the role of India. He said, "Spirituality must conquer the world. Slowly they (westerners) are finding out that what they want is spirituality to preserve them as nations. . . . The whole of the western world is perched on a volcano which may burst and go to pieces tomorrow. They have searched every corner of the world and found no respite. They have drunk deep of the cup of pleasure and have found it to be mere vanity. Now is the time to work, so that India's spiritual ideas may penetrate deep into the West." This reveals not only a faith in spirituality, in the truth of the Spirit, in the truth of a Being of the nature of eternal Existence-Consciousness-Bliss, but also a faith that India is a country highly competent to spread the message of spiritua-

lity. To abandon this role would mean for India the casting away of "Swadharma", one's own inner law of being. Intellect, erudition, scholarship, had never by themselves charmed Aurobindo and in the person of Shri Ramakrishna he found solid gold, naked spirituality shorn of all intellectual embellishment. Aurobindo said of the sage of Dakshineswar: "Shri Ramakrishna himself but lived what many would call the life of a mad man, a man without intellectual training, a man without any outward sign of culture or civilization, a man who lived on the alms of others, such a man as the English-educated Indian would ordinarily talk of as one unless to society, though not a bane to society. He will say: 'This man is ignorant. What does he know? What can he teach me who has received from the West all that it can teach?' But God knew what he was doing. He sent that man to Bengal and set him in the temple of Dakshineswar in Calcutta, and from North and South, and East and West, the educated men, men who were the pride of the university, who had studied all that Europe could teach, came to fall at the feet of this ascetic. The work of salvation, the work of raising India was begun."

It is plain that Aurobindo was attracted more by spirituality than by anything else. At the same time, he knew that spirituality was not something to be attained by mere intellect (*Na Medhayā, Na Bahunā Shrutena*). He also knew that the Atman could not be attained by the weak and the cowardly (*Na Balaheenena Labhyah*). There was the great road to spirituality shown by the ancient Rishis, the Yoga-vidhi referred to in Kathopanishad. It has been described as a path which is "sharp like a razor's edge" and "very difficult to tread". But his innate nature inevitably and unmistakably was leading him to the spiritual path which he was later to illumine by a brilliant flame lit by arduous and daring Sadhana, all his own.

He had had some spiritual experiences before he settled down in Baroda. He had not given much thought or importance to them. That was before he started his Yoga practices. It is said that K. G. Deshpande once urged him to take to Yoga. But at that time he had not the inner call. Gradually, however, it became urgent for him to follow the path of Yoga. The call developed into an insistent demand. Nothing short of the acme of spiritual experience, which the ancients have so eloquently described, could be his ideal. It is usual for aspirants to try to find a Guru who would fully initiate the disciple into the mysterious path. But Aurobindo could not find a Guru to suit him. He was fortunate, however, in obtaining inspiration from several worthy people. Shri Sadguru Brahmananda at Chandod on the Narmada is mentioned as one of the great saintly men who blessed him and gave Darshan. Although it was said he never looked into the eyes of those who went to see him, in the case of Aurobindo, he not only did so but also showered good wishes on the would-be Yogi. Aurobindo later referred to his eyes as being very beautiful. But it must be mentioned that they had no talk with each other. It is believed that one of the disciples of Brahmananda gave Aurobindo his first lessons in Prānāyām. It is said that he visited Chandod two or three times. Though we cannot say that these contacts were decisive, it is quite obvious that they all tended to guide him along the path which was now quite clear before him. His Yogic Sadhana started with contemplation and Pranayam in 1904 and he spent hours in practice. It seems that later, from 1907, contact with Shri Lele of Gwalior helped Aurobindo quite positively. On two occasions he called on him for help and each time the directions received were relevant and extremely useful. Aurobindo's Sadhana was without doubt mostly self-directed. By the time that he left Baroda for Calcutta he had already

advanced a great deal. This advance in Yoga gave him deeper insight, greater strength, firmer faith, and more confidence in himself.

This chapter on preparation would not be complete without some mention of the steps Aurobindo took towards organising several revolutionary groups. It was part of his political work and as was usual with him, done quite noiselessly and inconspicuously. It should be noted that Aurobindo never directly took part in arms-training, the making of bombs, collection of ammunition, or military studies. He did the work of inspiring and of strengthening the moral fibre of those who wanted to join the groups. After 1901 when Barindra, his younger brother, joined him in Baroda, he began to take great interest in this form of activity. But nothing of importance was accomplished till 1902 when some attempt at organisation was made.

The seed of the whole movement may be traced to the "Lotus and Dagger" society of London. That body in itself was no doubt practically still-born, but Aurobindo was one of those who took seriously the secret oath to set India free. The idea of secret revolutionary societies was not new in Europe. There were a number of them in Ireland, and the Carbonari of Italy were quite famous. The idea found favour with the youth of India and from the outset, groups began to be organised in Bengal and Maharashtra, more than any other province. The general plan was to organise throughout the land small handy groups of ardent youths pledged to sacrifice and to secrecy, for their country. They were to be trained to live a hardy life, to the use of arms, and to movements of a military nature. When sufficient men had been organized throughout the land, at a given signal there was to be an armed revolution and a coup. It was calculated that it would take about thirty years to become fully organized. Leaders like Tilak, Lajpat

Rai and other extremists were in touch with some of these groups and although they never discouraged them, they were themselves never organisers nor in the centre of things. They looked upon this activity as something complementary and possibly useful. Though unfortunately some of the members of these groups degenerated into terrorists, the main idea and inspiration was an open armed rebellion, perhaps with the help of the Indian Army, which was sought to be tampered with.

It is neither possible nor necessary to give here the full details of Aurobindo's activities in this field. Especially because once Barindra became active and entered into the arena of revolutionary politics, Aurobindo's direct connection with the groups practically ceased. In fact, he had made it quite clear to Barindra and Upendra that he would have no direct connection with them and that they should manage the whole thing themselves. But until he actually left Bengal he had full knowledge of what was going on to the extent that he knew that Khudiram Bose and his associate had left for Muzaffarpur with bombs! He continued to inspire the youths who thought in terms of revolution. It is sufficient if we indicate the type of work he did and the way he did it. By making arrangements to have Jatin Bannerji, a young and ardent Bengali, trained in the Baroda cavalry, he may be said to have made a concrete beginning. This was in spite of the British Government's ban on enlistment of Bengalis in the army and many years after he arrived in Baroda. Jatin was then asked to go to Bengal to survey the field from the point of view of persuading suitable young men to start centres. Aurobindo visited some of the districts of Bengal during his vacations and contacted several potential recruits. During 1904 and later he visited Khulna, Midnapur, Dacca, Rangpur and other places. Taking the oath was a great ceremony. Sometimes, it was with the Gita in one hand and

the sword in the other. Aurobindo was in touch with some of the Maharashtra revolutionaries, among whom Haribhau Modak, Kaka Patil and some others met him at Thana near Bombay in September 1904. It is strange that even people like Rajnarayan Bose were caught in the vortex of this movement. The young Rabindranath Tagore also took the oath. Sometimes magistrates and I.C.S. officers of the calibre of Jogen Mukherji and Charuchandra Dutt of Thana would lend a helping hand to the cause. In 1902, Sister Nivedita went to Baroda for the express purpose of contacting Aurobindo in this connection and through him, to enlist the sympathies of the Maharajah! "I hear you are a worshipper of Shakti—force," was the way she accosted him. He had read her booklet on "Kali the Mother". Madhavarao, a nephew of Khaserao Jadhav of Baroda, was sent to England to receive training in arms, and military education which included the manufacture of bombs and revolvers. Aurobindo gave some financial help to the venture. There was also some idea of establishing a "Bhavani Mandir" (mentioned in the Rowlatt Report), a place in some mountain retreat where youth could be trained in spirituality and revolution. Perhaps "Anand Math" was the parent of this idea. Aurobindo was the author of the pamphlet "Bhavani Mandir". The book explained the purpose of founding a centre where a powerful blend of spirituality and patriotism could be inculcated among the inmates. Hemendra Das, Mandavale, Mitter, Jatin, Barindra, and Thakur Ramsingh, who was looked upon as keyman, were some of the important persons connected with this movement. With them Aurobindo had contacts. Active work in this matter was begun only in 1902. As I have said however, this was but a small chapter in Aurobindo's life and when he later launched out into the wider stormy sea of political life, he ceased to take active part in these hap-

penings in the backwaters, though he maintained contacts with them as long as he was in Bengal.

To sum up, these thirteen years of great preparation, with hardly any diversion, laid the foundation of everything in Aurobindo's life which afterwards was to manifest itself abundantly and blaze forth with resplendence. It was during these years that he became acquainted with the rich heritage of India and the East. He continued to add to his knowledge of the West and of science by keeping in touch with the most recent books on the subjects. His literary output helped him to fix his ideas and form his own style. His political convictions became stronger and he felt confident that he could present his ideas incisively and with great effect. His patriotism found a deeper base in spirituality and his spirituality became a stern fact of his conscious life. No longer did it remain a mere aspiration or an empty longing. But since spirituality is not merely an intellectual affair but a matter of experience, he started on the journey to making it his own along the well-beaten path of Yoga. He had married but at the same time decided that he should lift himself and his consort out of the ordinary level of man and wife relationship, and live as companion spirits that aspire after perfect beatitude.

Thus at the young age of thirty-four, Aurobindo was ready to enter into the whirl of political life with equipment of an extraordinary kind. Apart from the usual qualifications and achievements, of which he had more than enough, here was a man, who believed that the finger of God was in everything, who looked upon India as the Divine Mother, who had faith in India's spiritual mission, who knew both the East and the West inside out, and who had already advanced to a great extent in Yogic Sadhana. From the ordinary view-point, these were not qualifications which fitted a man for politics. Possibly by some, they were looked

upon as disqualifications. But India's politics of those days were not so much the usual power politics but politics of the fight for independence. What was required of the leader was the power to rouse the consciousness of the people to the abnormal Indian situation, to inspire them with confidence, to give them a programme of service and self-sacrifice and to raise them from the abject position of the crawling cripples that they were to the level of heroes. It is obvious that Aurobindo was eminently fitted for this task. During the few years that he strode across the political arena of India, he swept everything before him and became the idol of the younger generation which was eager for effective action.

CHAPTER V

THE CALL TO ACTION

WHILE Aurobindo was going through a period of preparation for heroic action and active leadership of the political forces of his country, the country itself was also advancing from a state of dumb, sullen acquiescence to the stage of effective agitation, through open and bold expression. Congress was still plodding along its old way but there were now vocal elements in and outside the party which openly avowed that the old days were gone. The younger generation was impatient of foreign rule. Men like Lala Lajpatrai in the Punjab, Lokmanya Tilak in Maharashtra, Bipin Chandra Pal in Bengal were eagerly listened to when they made impassioned speeches which called for vigorous action. Aurobindo was already in touch with the revolutionaries—not terrorists—in Western India and had repeated his vow to end British rule. From the beginning however, it was Barindra, Aurobindo's younger brother, who was more active

in this work. It is now well-known that Aurobindo was not theoretically against violence, if it was to be used for the righteous cause of the liberation of the country. But after a full objective survey, he realized that under the circumstances, open agitation, non-cooperation and passive resistance would be a more broadbased and effective remedy in the case of India.

The whole soul of the Indian nation was, no doubt, in a ferment, though beyond newspaper and platform agitation not much was visible on the surface. The gospel of revolution could not, in the very nature of things, make much headway, as during preparation for it, some kind of camouflage had always to be adopted. There were a few Anusheelan Samitis and other Sabhas and groups which sheltered revolutionary planning but ostensibly taught physical training, lathi and swordplay. Apart from these activities, however, which were current all over the country, by far the most widespread general awakening was in Bengal. A biography of Shivaji and "Desher Katha", both written in Bengali by one Sakharam Ganesh Deuskar, a domiciled Marathi gentleman, created a great stir among the Bengali youth. The word "Swaraj" was first used by him to indicate complete independence. Afterwards, it became a word universally used and understood in this sense. Brahmabandhava Upadhyaya, the editor of "Sandhya", a Bengali weekly, did a great deal to foster this magic word. Dadabhai Naoroji used it later in the famous Congress resolution of 1906 to mean self-government. It required twenty-three years more however, for Congress to use it in its resolution (1929) to mean "Complete Independence without British connection".

Once the Indian mind had been awakened by the new breath of the great renaissance, and the thirst for independence had become intense, strength was bound to be drawn from events occurring even outside India's border. The most

significant of such events was the victory of the Japanese over the Russians in 1904-05. An oriental nation, which but very recently had begun to adopt western methods and scientific discoveries, gave a crushing defeat to a big and mighty power like Russia. This fact sent a thrill through the mind of the Indian and helped him to shed the inferiority complex which was then haunting all eastern nations. The religious zeal with which the gospel of nationalism was preached by Mazzini, the colourful heroism of Garibaldi, the skilful statesmanship of Count Cavour and the practical patriotism of Victor Emanuel lent special charm to the Italian scene. Then the Irish struggle for freedom was still on. The dogged persistence with which it was waged against odds, coupled with the suffering and sacrifice of the Irish heroes, was very helpful in inspiring our youth in their struggle against England. The difference, however, was obvious. While there was a continuous tradition of fight for independence in Ireland for centuries, in India love for the nation and for independence had to be cultivated afresh.

All vigorous elements in the country were seething with discontent, though no organised channel had yet been found for releasing this fund of strong feeling. It was reserved for the hard-boiled imperialist, Lord Curzon, to provide the immediate cause for an outburst. It came in the form of the partition of Bengal on the 29th of September 1905. The proposal had been before the country for some time and as soon as it was known that the seal was set, there was one spontaneous uproar. Bengal was soon a mass of agitation, it being the most affected. The 18th of October was observed as a day of mourning by the whole of Bengal. Many fasted. Numerous meetings were held and resolutions of protest were passed. But something more concrete was added. Thousands of students left their schools and colleges as a protest and a "Use Swadeshi" vow was administered with

loud acclaim at meetings. Huge piles of foreign cloth were burnt to ashes. In Barisal, a protest procession headed by Ashwini Kumar Dutt was taken out. This was perhaps the first organized procession in deliberate defiance of a government order, in India's struggle for freedom. Aurobindo was in the first row of it. It was dispersed by the police with the help of a lathi-charge. But the spirit of the people remained unbroken and challenging. The Rubicon had been crossed and there was no returning. The tide went on swelling everywhere and soon spread and covered the whole of India. It was evident even to the government that the challenge had been accepted.

It happened that at that time, Congress was the only all-India organization which could speak for the nation. But the moderate element was still predominant there. Outside, the forces of extremism were swelling and Congress had to recognize that fact at the Bombay session in 1904. Aurobindo attended that meeting although not as an active agitator. At the Banaras Congress in 1905, the elderly statesmen began to realize that the ranks of the extremists had swollen still further and that it would not be possible to postpone very much longer the sounding of the death-knell of moderation in Indian politics. Partition had come as a shock even to the moderates and had helped to move them into action. But still they were unwilling to join hands with the extremists. Dadabhai's shrewdness and venerable personality prevented the two forces from clashing openly in Calcutta in 1906. He was president of the session and persuaded the moderates to accept the fourfold programme proposed by the extremists, chief among whom were Tilak and Aurobindo. This programme became famous immediately as "the Chatus-Sootri". The main items included a demand for self-government, spread of national education, the propagation of Swadeshi, and boycott of foreign goods.

Though Aurobindo played a prominent yet silent part in forcing the issue on behalf of the extremists, his action may still be said to have been "incognito". Tilak directly collaborated with him and recognised him as the coming man of Bengal. And yet Aurobindo had still not taken the plunge and he continued to be a professor at Baroda. He was publicity-shy. But circumstances soon forced him to the fore and made him both *de jure* and *de facto* leader of awakened Bengal and of militant India.

It may be useful on the eve of his direct and active entry into politics, to peep into the working of the mind of Aurobindo at this time. It is clear that there were two strong urges in him running parallel with each other; one was the spiritual and the other, the political. But it is clear that the political urge was subordinate to and took its inspiration from the spiritual one. His love of the mother country, and his decision to liberate her from the bonds of slavery were, as we know, as old as his school days in England. During his stay in Baroda, this urge had strengthened still further and he had become "renationalized" with a firm grounding in Indian history and culture. His presence at the Congress in Ahmedabad in 1902 and later in Bombay as well as in Calcutta and his close association with Lokmanya Tilak set the seal on the kind of political career he would soon be entering. It was clear that his sympathies were with the revolutionaries and that he thought there was sufficient justification for their action, if matters remained as they were. So far as his own path was concerned, it lay along the fourfold programme prepared and passed at the Calcutta Congress.

It must be stressed, however, that both Aurobindo's patriotism and politics were rooted in his spirituality. They did not mean anything to him unless they were connected and made part of his Sadhana ("his own work", as he

called it) for the realization of the Supreme. The language of his politics and patriotism was always suffused with spirituality. He spoke and wrote more like a poet and a prophet and a visionary than as an ordinary politician. India's spiritual mission loomed far larger before his vision than mere political freedom, which he considered, was bound to come in due course. His spiritual Sadhana continued with great intensity throughout his political career and the time spent in suffering and solitude while in jail was converted into an opportunity for deeper communion with the Spirit. A letter written to his wife, Mrinalini, in 1905 bears out all that has been said about his positive spiritual inclinations at this time. Even so, the next four years, constituted one of the briefest political careers in history and yet it was remarkably brilliant and most effective. Externally, it was the most active period of his public life. It was also the most eventful and the most colourful one, compared with the other periods of his life.

Things were gradually shaping themselves in such a way that Aurobindo had to throw off his thin mask and come out into the open arena of turbulent politics. By the beginning of 1906, his attraction for Bengal had become positive. He was already writing in "Yugantar", a revolutionary Bengali paper started by his younger but more fiery brother, Barindra. Although his name did not appear anywhere, very few were ignorant of the fact that he was writing in it. Four or five editors went to jail on account of some of the articles. They did not defend themselves as they refused to recognise the British court as a court of justice! This was the first occasion on which this bold stand had been taken by a journal and severe consequences faced. Aurobindo took long leave from Baroda college at this time and organised the extreme nationalist element in Bengal. At the request of Bipin Pal, he associated himself with his

English weekly "Bande Mataram" and began to write for its columns, but again without revealing his name. Meanwhile, the Maharaja of Baroda learnt that Aurobindo was not likely to return, and specially requested him not to leave Baroda and the college. But destiny had her own designs. Ultimately he took one year's leave and in August 1906 joined the staff of the Bengal National College as professor of English on a small salary of Rs. 150/- per month, which was but one-fifth of his salary at Baroda! Thus the last link with Baroda was almost cut and the new one with Bengal and Calcutta forged. Henceforth, at any rate for the next four years, his activities lay directly in the field of politics and in the struggle India was waging for her freedom.

In Calcutta, the main burden of knitting together the extremists and openly challenging the moderate school of thought fell upon Aurobindo. The Swadeshi agitation had given great fillip to the extremist party, and the repressive policy of the government had strengthened nationalism. Very soon the "Bande Mataram" became a very popular daily. It leapt into prominence throughout India and its inspiring message entered every patriot's home. Practically all financial as well as the editorial burden of the journal shifted to the shoulders of Aurobindo. The government was already apprehensive and began to seek an opportunity to remove him from the scene of action. Two prosecutions for sedition were launched, one against some articles in the "Yugantar" and another against some letter to the editor and articles in the "Bande Mataram" which had been reproduced from "Yugantar". But the government was completely worsted in both the attempts. The authorship of the "Yugantar" articles was owned by the brother of Swami Vivekananda and he was therefore sentenced. Regarding those in the "Bande Mataram", the prosecution had

no real evidence to prove Aurobindo's authorship. However, as soon as he learnt that he was going to be arrested, he went himself to the police station. But he was soon released on bail. When the case came up for hearing, the Chief Presidency Magistrate, Mr. Kingsford, not only acquitted him but also declared that the general tone of "Bande Mataram" was not seditious!

The Bande Mataram case did one signal service for the cause. Overnight, not only the journal but also its main inspiration and leader-writer was brought suddenly and very prominently before the public eye. The gifted writer and the dedicated soul behind the daily outpourings of the journal now became the idol of the nation. It was like the refulgent sun, so long hidden behind the clouds, bursting into full view. Aurobindo could no longer act from behind the scenes and his life for the next three years had to be lived in the full glare of publicity, however much his temperament was unsuited for it. As he once said, he only suffered publicity when it was necessary in the cause of Truth.

The government, no doubt, was very much discomfited by its failure to convict Aurobindo on the charge of sedition. The fact of the matter was, that apart from the lack of evidence, Aurobindo's writing maintained a very high level and was always free from hatred and incitement to violence. His emphasis was on love for Mother India and sacrifice of everything for her. He spoke in terms of a religion and a gospel and not in terms of ordinary political jargon. He pitted self-rule against foreign rule, however good the latter might be. It was difficult, therefore, to find a legal excuse for silencing him. The "Statesman" once complained that the articles in "Bande Mataram" were legally unassailable though full of sedition! The same paper also paid a compliment to the cleverness of the writer and to his skill in the use of the English language. Though Aurobindo could

not communicate his full spirit to his three assistants, Shyam Sunder Chakravarty had picked up his style marvellously well. It was sometimes difficult to discover the exact writer of particular articles. The imitation was so perfect.

The Bande Mataram case definitely increased in a number of ways the responsibilities of Aurobindo. He had to resign his post at the National College in order to avert suspicion by the government. The mantle of leadership of the nationalist party now fell upon him openly and he had to devote further time for organising it. So, action was no longer a matter of his choice. Round about this time, from October to the middle of December 1906, Aurobindo suffered a severe illness and stayed for sometime in Deoghar and for sometime at the house of his father-in-law in Serpentine Lane, Calcutta. The illness is described as being a very serious one. But he had hardly any rest or respite. Positive obligations of editing, conducting, and financing "Bande Mataram" were his, together with other duties of public speaking, attending public functions, consolidating and leading the nationalist element, and so on. A letter to Mrinalini at this time is very revealing. He fondly complains of the burden that God has been pleased to heap upon his shoulders, and at the same time he begs of her to send him her best wishes, so that, like a warrior-knight, he may venture forth with greater enthusiasm and with surer self-confidence. He exhorts her to act as his Sahadharmini and his Shakti.

The immediate task before him in the latter part of 1907, was to organize the nationalist party in Bengal for securing victory at Surat. In fact, after Aurobindo's success at the provincial conference in Midnapore, where his party carried all resolutions by an overwhelming majority, Lokmanya Tilak invited him to go to Surat with a large number of members. The major political parties had decided to measure their strength there. The moderates had stalwarts

like Pherozeshah Mehta, Gokhale and Rash Behari Ghosh. The extremists were led by Lokmanya Tilak. The former were struggling hard to keep Congress at a safe distance from all active and extremist agitation. Though extreme resolutions had been passed under pressure at Calcutta, there was no talk about their implementation. The extremists considered it highly stultifying to see the only nationwide organisation, which had already been speaking for a quarter century in the name of the country, sitting with folded hands while a challenge had been thrown by the imperial rulers.

The stage, therefore, was set for a struggle and the nationalists who were in the opposition had to prepare for a show-down. Before the beginning of the regular sessions, the nationalists met under the presidentship of Aurobindo and it was decided to force the issue by challenging the moderates in the matter of electing the president and by proposing an alternative name. The critical moment came and Lokmanya Tilak proposed a motion for temporary adjournment with a view to reopen the question of the president's election. Tilak was declared to have no right to do anything like that. He stood firm and adamant, however, insisting on his right to a hearing. A mild attempt on the part of the moderates was made to remove Tilak from the platform. This proved to be a signal for general uproar. Shoes and chairs went into the air, swinging hither and thither, and the meeting broke up in confusion. Immediately afterwards, the nationalists met in protest and pledged themselves to carry the new gospel to the people. Again Aurobindo, who was mainly responsible for the decision to break away rather than surrender to the moderate view, presided, and he called upon the young men assembled to take a vow to sacrifice their all for the mother country and never to rest till freedom was won.

The Surat Congress ended in a fiasco but made history.

The result was that the moderates continued to possess only the body of the Congress while the spirit went out along with the extremists. For the next ten years, Indian nationalism flourished outside the precincts of the national organisation. When it returned to the charge in 1916, it completely routed the moderates, who later continued their existence outside the Congress as a small and not very influential coterie. They ceased to be a political force in the country.

Aurobindo's triumph was complete in the Surat imbroglio in so far as a rude shock had been administered to complacent elderly politicians. A new avenue opened before the younger spirits who were eager for a militant programme. He had a new responsibility also of propagating the aggressive nationalism for which he and his friends thought it necessary to wreck even the Congress session. Therefore, instead of returning straight to Calcutta, he responded to the call of a number of cities to address them, beginning with Baroda. He then visited Bombay, Poona, Nasik and Amraoti. In all places he was received with great warmth. He delivered lectures which proved to be stirring and inspiring.

Parallel with intense political activity but as a deeper undercurrent, Aurobindo again had some experiences of a spiritual nature, the full meaning and significance of which was deep and far-reaching. The Yogic Sadhana he had begun in Baroda was continuous and his progress quite rapid in spite of external activity. He felt at that stage that he should consult an authority on Yoga. Therefore, while in Baroda, Lele was urgently invited to visit him. At a telegraphic call from Barindra, he came from Gwalior and in the last week of December 1907 had long consultations with Aurobindo. It was during these important talks that Lele measured the great strides that his friend had made and suggested that he should concentrate on making his mind a complete blank—Nirvishaya—so that the Divine

might enter and take possession. In this practice, the intrepid seeker succeeded and he later attained a stage when he could suspend the ego and all its multifarious trappings and deliver himself completely into the hands of the Spirit. Thenceforward, he was in a position to say that he was a puppet in the hands of his Maker and was himself but a Nimittamatra, a mere instrument. A letter to his wife at about this time, mentions that he was no longer his own master and that in future he would live and move according to the dictates of the Supreme.

Lele travelled with him to Bombay and to Poona and then returned to his own home. Aurobindo had attained a certain equanimity and could establish peace within himself. The question arose as to what he should do about delivery of his message and his mission on which he was so set. Lele solved the difficulty by suggesting that while he stood before an audience, he should suspend the process of conscious thought, close his eyes for a moment and then face the audience with folded hands as if he were in the presence of God himself. Lele assured him that the needed utterance would then come without effort. It did happen like that in Bombay and the audience was held spell-bound. Aurobindo was never an eloquent orator as so many demagogues are. He spoke in simple slow English. His words appeared to come directly from the heart rather than from the brain. The effect on the audience was tremendous. The stamp of sincerity was evident in every word and more than anything else, the depth of feeling was so impressive.

Throughout his speeches, he emphasised the gospel of nationalism. While speaking in Bombay, he said that nationalism was not a mere political programme. It was a religion that had come from God. It could not be crushed, it was immortal. He preached faith in God and in the mission of India. Service of the Mother, sacrifice for her,

self-help and Swadeshi, these and the other eternal virtues of heroes and of men of God were the burden of his inspired song of patriotism. These sentiments coming from him as from a highly charged dynamo, thrilled his audiences and for the time being, they felt spiritually lifted and became conscious of something deeper in themselves. He was at once the seer and the prophet of nationalism in India, the preacher and poet of pure patriotism, the pioneer and the torch-bearer of the great army that was to lead a crusade against all that was gross and evil.

Aurobindo returned to Calcutta after his triumphant tour of the important cities and was again caught up in the whirl of constant activity. Now not only the youth of Bengal but of the whole of India looked to him for inspiration. In every mind that had an iota of idealism or a touch of spirituality, his message evoked a ready response. While this was the case with the new militant and fast-spreading creed of nationalism after the Surat debacle, the government looked at the picture from quite a different angle. They took the split in Congress as an excellent opportunity for suppressing the more aggressive elements in Indian politics and began their preparations.

In the course of propagation of the creed of nationalism and the elaboration of the programme of the fight for freedom, Aurobindo developed his ideas further. It is highly interesting to note how similar were his ideas to those of Mahatma Gandhi who later, in 1920, was to present to the country his complete and detailed technique of nonviolent non-cooperation. His ground and approach, however, was different. It has already been made clear that Aurobindo was not a pacifist in the Gandhian sense; but the study of the objective conditions of India and the reading of the mind of the people drove both him and Lokmanya to the same conclusions to which Gandhiji came in 1920. Both Tilak

and Aurobindo, however, knew that there were some hot-heads preparing for a bloody revolution. Both felt that that was the logical result of the cult of severe repression. At the same time, both equally knew that that was not the way which would lead to national regeneration. They sympathised with the aspirations of the youths engaged in these activities but they were neither personally connected with any conspiracy nor were they in touch with organized violent programmes and activities. It is thought necessary to state this matter here clearly because at one stage or another the government sought to implicate them directly in violent conspiracies to overthrow the government.

It has already been indicated that the government had decided to take the path of repression. So much so, that Minto, who had succeeded Curzon as Viceroy and continued the policy of repression with a heavy hand, was addressed by Morley, then State Secretary, as follows: "I must confess to you that I am watching with the deepest concern and dismay the thundering sentences that are being passed for sedition, etc. We must keep order, but excess of severity is not the path to order. On the contrary, it is the path to the bomb". It was exactly the same sentiment as was expressed in "Kesari", a Marathi weekly conducted by Tilak, in an article entitled "Bombeche Rahasya" (the Secret of the Bomb), and which earned for Tilak not only a prosecution but also jail for six years! This was written subsequent to the bomb-throw by Khudiram at Muzaffarpur. Bureaucracy had already decided to remove Tilak from the scene of action and the sedition case found as a handy excuse.

The same bureaucratic attitude was adopted throughout India. And Bengal happened to be a storm-centre since it was the partition of this province that had set the country ablaze. It was not only agitators who were the targets but also editors, public men and students. An atmosphere of

suppressed fear, of terror and of uncertainty prevailed in almost all the important towns. Proceedings were drawn against Bramhabandhava Upadhyaya, a noted Bengali journalist, but long before the trial he died in a hospital in Calcutta. A young boy Sushil Sen of Calcutta, was ordered to be flogged in court ostensibly for having said "Bande Mataram" or for some other such technical offence. These two incidents seem to have incensed two youths who thought of murdering Mr. Kingsford, then the District Judge of Muzaffarpur.

The boys threw a bomb at the supposed carriage of Mr. Kingsford on the 30th of April 1908. It was a wholly misdirected bomb thrown by two utterly misled youths of Bengal. The victims proved to be Mrs. Kennedy and Miss Kennedy, who were wholly innocent of all politics. Shyam Sunder Chakravarty wrote editorially in the "Bande Mataram" that such an action had no sanction in Indian tradition or culture and that it was but a poor imitation of western anarchism. It was, he said, quite foreign to the true and noble nationalism for which Bengal and India stood. But the government took quite a different view and made it a starting point for letting loose the forces of ruthless repression and removing every one of worth from the political field.

The Muzaffarpur outrage was the first of its kind in India. Outside the small circle which might have organized it, none hailed or admired it. The reactions naturally varied in different quarters. The European community and the Anglo-Indian press took an alarmist view and called for severe suppression. The younger generation in India looked upon it as a deed of daring, irrespective of its merits or demerits, and was thrilled. The moderate element condemned the whole affair in no uncertain terms. The nationalists too openly repudiated it but did not question the motive

and the sacrifice involved. They pointed out that this was a symptom of the mounting desperation of the country and that the government should take it as a warning and treat it not as a challenge but as a pointer to where their repressive policy was leading.

The police began investigations and a miniature bomb factory was soon discovered at Maniktolla. A number of people were arrested including Barindra, Aurobindo's brother, who was thought to be the brain behind the whole plot. Aurobindo was also suspected and arrested while in his bed at 5 a.m. on the 2nd of May 1908. He was to be led to prison in ropes! But Bhupen Basu persuaded the police to abandon the idea and got the rope round his waist removed. The surreptitious and cruel manner of his arrest and the unseemly search that followed are the subject of a Bengali book "Kara-Kahini" by Aurobindo himself. The police, however, found nothing in the search. He was then living with his wife Mrinalini and his sister Sarojini. He was about to begin editing "Navashakti", a Bengali daily and had moved to new premises with that view. Besides the two Ghose brothers, thirty-four others were implicated and hauled up for trial. Then followed the long trial throughout the whole of the next year.

It can be said without exaggeration that Aurobindo's arrest created as much sensation as the bomb-throw itself. Universal resentment was felt and the fact that he was sought to be led to jail in ropes was condemned everywhere. The trial, known as the Maniktolla Bomb Case or the Alipore Case, was conducted within the precincts of the jail itself, and is probably one of the most famous political trials in Indian history. It was significant, especially in one particular, which was that one of the accused was Aurobindo, the saintly patriot. Throughout the trial he was nonchalant and hardly followed the proceedings. He was busy with what he called "his

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own work". Prompted by his inner voice, he entrusted the case entirely to Chittaranjan Das, a young and rising advocate who later led Bengal in politics for many years with distinction and success.

While the case dragged on, supreme efforts were made by the prosecution to implicate Aurobindo and secure a conviction. No less a legal luminary than Eardley Norton was engaged by them. But all was to no avail and Aurobindo emerged innocent, unscathed and triumphant. The able and prophetic advocacy of Chittaranjan raised the trial almost to an epic level. His famous final appeal to the court still rings in the ears because it has proved to be true to the letter. He said to Mr. Beachcroft, who was the judge in the case, "My appeal to you is this, that long after the controversy will be hushed in silence, long after this turmoil and the agitation will have ceased, long after he is dead and gone, he will be looked upon as the poet of patriotism, as the prophet of nationalism and the lover of humanity. Long after he is dead and gone, his words will be echoed and re-echoed, not only in India but across distant seas and lands. Therefore, I say that the man in his position is not only standing before the bar of this court, but before the bar of the High Court of History". The assessors in the case declared Aurobindo "not guilty" on the 13th of April, 1909. About three weeks later, the judge acquitted him while he sentenced most of the other accused to various terms of imprisonment.

No doubt, by reason of its being the first bomb conspiracy case, it has a sufficiently important place in our history. But more than the trial and his subsequent dramatic acquittal, the most important event during Aurobindo's stay in jail was his reaching the acme of spiritual endeavour. It was his most valuable achievement. For long, he had been denied any rest, any seclusion, any relief from the

constant strain of public life. He felt that he wanted it badly and yet he saw no way of getting it. Here an opportunity offered itself. He called it his "Ashramvas". It led him through intense Sadhana to the very summit of God-consciousness. He saw the mystic vision of Shri Krishna everywhere and experienced the charms of ineffable unitive life. For him, the jail, the jailor, the police, the court, the accuser, the judge all were transformed and became but the manifestations of one Vasudeo "Vasudevah Sarvam". If only a year ago, he had realized that he was but an instrument of God, he now saw vividly nothing but God all round him. Throughout his jail-life, the Gita and its full message had sunk into every nook and cranny of his consciousness and he emerged a full-fledged God-inspired man of vision who had seen God face to face and had felt his immanence in every atom of the universe.

He made no secret of his great experience. His Uttarpada speech of 30th May, in 1909, delivered three weeks after his acquittal, is full of the vision he had had and the realization he had attained. Many papers, especially "The Indian Social Reformer" edited by Kamakshi Natarajan, and "Bengalee" edited by Surendranath, criticised and ridiculed the religious slant in Aurobindo. But he cared not for their opinion. It was no longer with him a matter of intellectual conviction or of blind faith but he had had a vivid and vital experience of a Spiritual Presence filling the universe which was but His manifestation. This experience thus set the seal for the time being on his Sadhana. He had yet to go through another lap of public activity before retiring to Pondicherry, his final Ashram, where he would attain still higher spiritual summits and from where he would preach his unique gospel.

Aurobindo emerged from Alipore a changed man and stepped into a changed India. Jail had not only given him

a vision of God but had also transformed him from a flaming agitator into a mature and serene political philosopher. The emphasis now on 'Yoga for humanity' had strengthened. He saw that the steam roller of repression had silenced many a voice and stopped many a pen and sent all the topmost agitators to jail. In his Uttarpara speech he made a feeling reference to Tilak: "...I find all changed. One who always sat by my side and was associated in my work is a prisoner in Burma". He realized also that the enthusiasm once manifested through the million-throated shouts of Bande Mataram had cooled into a sullen but ominous silence. And yet he carried on his work as he saw the hand of God even in repression. "Without suffering there can be no growth", he said. He proceeded with indomitable faith in the future.

It was unfortunate that "Bande Mataram" had ceased publication during his incarceration. Now, however, he decided to launch a new organ for a fresh and deeper gospel. He published "Karmayogin", weekly in English, and "Dharma", a weekly in Bengali. In these journals he almost transcended the political plane, although his politics had never been mere politics. He thought that all life was "Karmayoga", if lived in the true spirit of the Gita, and all life was "Dharma", true religion, if dedicated to winning Him through constant Sadhana. He had, however, to deal with politics and political problems and even with political controversies in the columns of his new journals. This was inevitable since he continued to champion, and practically single-handed, the nationalism which he had been so instrumental in building up and in popularizing. But his stress was now more and more on the spiritual approach and the higher attitude, even in dealing with mundane and day-to-day affairs.

He spent about ten months more in the field before retiring for good from active life, to the great place of Tapas

where he continued for forty uninterrupted years his lifelong Sadhana. But those few months were full of activity, and brilliant contributions were made to constructive political thought, to the interpretation of Indian culture, to the gospel of nationalism, and above all to the spiritual way of life, which he emphasised as peculiarly Indian. Along with other greater things, his writings sought to resuscitate the flagging political zeal, to defend the nationalist standpoint and to fill the people with faith and hope in the future of India. But he did not see much immediate hope of reviving the old fire. In the meanwhile, the Morley-Minto reforms and their acceptance by the moderate school of thinkers further demoralized the political atmosphere.

Next to spiritual and vigorous cultural ideas, the most valuable legacy left by Aurobindo through the columns of "Karmayogin" were his political policies and programmes as well as his ideas about constructive nationalism. When he came out of jail, he was practically alone in giving authoritative expression to extremist views and in giving a lead to the country in these matters. Most others of his stature had been either deported or were behind bars. He bore the brunt of criticism by Anglo-Indian as well as moderate papers and in clear ringing tones continued to plan the path for the nationalists. It was another matter that there was not sufficient stamina left in the people at that time. That made Aurobindo feel increasingly that the fight may have to be carried on in later times and by other leaders.

When challenged by one of the speeches of G. K. Gokhale doubting the peaceful intentions of the nationalists, Aurobindo retaliated in one of his speeches with a masterly statement. He said, ".... We have told the people that there is a peaceful means of achieving independence in whatever form we aspired to it. We have said that by self-help, by passive resistance, we can achieve it.... Passive

resistance means two things. It means first that in certain matters we shall not co-operate with the government of this country until it gives us what we consider our rights. Secondly, if we are persecuted, if the plough of repression is passed over us, we shall meet it, not by violence, but by suffering, by passive resistance, by lawful means. We have not said to our young men, 'when you are repressed, retaliate'; we have said, 'suffer, . . . We are showing the people of this country, in passive resistance, the only way in which they can satisfy their legitimate aspiration without breaking the law and without resorting to violence.' This might well have been drafted by Gandhiji himself! In an open letter to his countrymen dated July 1909, he outlined a six-point programme which included self-help, peaceful passive resistance, non-cooperation with the government till control had been transferred, Swadeshi and effective boycott.

The series of articles, on the "Brain of India", were calculated to be essays on education, and are in vigorous defence of the principles of education followed by ancient India. In them he asks, what was the secret of the grand structure of culture and civilization which India had raised to heights, almost unapproached by any other country. Not merely in religion and philosophy, not merely in the world of ideas, of thought and of logic, but also in the practical fields of politics and administration, of industry and economics, of arts and sciences, of social organisation and happy living, India had progressed vastly and continuously for century upon century. What, he asked, was the vitality due to? Whence came this vigorous variety of forms in which individual and social life in India manifested itself? After a few years, he developed the latter theme more elaborately and to its full in a series of articles published in "Arya" known as "the Defence of Indian Culture". They were in reply to William Archer's superficial attack on the cultural

ideals and achievements of India. But here Aurobindo's limited aim was to discover the tap-root of all creative life and he pointed out that Brahmacharya and spiritual Sadhana of the highest type along the path of Yoga were the foundations of India's educational system. He pleaded for the application of the same principles to modern life and education in a modified and suitable form. He did not mean mechanical revival but recapture of the ancient spirit with a view to utilizing it in new terms and according to modern conditions. He believed first and foremost in the Spirit, but at the same time affirmed its manifestation in and through matter. The whole universe was all one movement of the Divine. It was in the light of that realization that he aimed at reconstructing the whole of life. "It is the Spirit alone that saves", he declared in the "Karmayogin", "and only by becoming great and free in heart, can we become socially and politically great and free". His nationalism also aimed at a fuller and wider life in the human family, when once India had regained her lost soul. The individual was never lost in the family, nor the family in the country. They found themselves in wider circles and expressed themselves better, if only they had self-respect and a life of their own.

Thus he hammered on eternal themes as well as on topical and political matters. But whatever he dealt with, his deep vision, his insight into the heart of things, his clarity of ideas was transparent. His masterly English phrase, often forceful and sometimes poetic, never forsook him, whatever the subject. His other activities continued. At the Hooghly political conference in September 1909, he carried the members with him in passing the nationalist resolutions. But all the time, he inwardly felt the call for seclusion. The call to attend to the urges in the higher regions of his consciousness was imperative. He was fully

assured of the future political destiny of India, and felt that he could now cease to lead the movement. He visualised that other times and new leaders would bring about its consummation. It was this urge and realization that ultimately led him out of the political field and into those ethereal regions, where one has to battle with far subtler forces to win greater triumphs, of a kind known and experienced only by spirits, comparatively free from attachment to the lower planes of consciousness.

Meanwhile, in July 1909, there were reliable intimations from Sister Nivedita that Aurobindo would again be arrested and this time his prize would be deportation. She had her own sources of information. But such things never worried Aurobindo. With the experience of his many prosecutions, he knew that he lived a charmed life and the net of bureaucracy was not capable of holding him. One thing was obvious however, he could not stay in India and yet be out of and free from politics.

It was at this juncture that he published an open letter to his countrymen which he considered to be his last political will and testament. As envisaged by him, its contents effectively changed the intentions of the government. In it he exhorted nationalists not to be unnerved by the coming or going of leaders. He said, "all great movements wait for the God-sent leader, the willing channel of His force, and only when he comes, move forward triumphantly to their fulfilment.... Therefore the nationalist party, the custodians of the future, must wait for the man who is to come". This appeared to be the end of his agitation, but for months afterwards, until as late as February 1910, he continued his work unabated. Finally the decision was taken out of his hands. The inner call was urgent and he left for Chandranagore in French territory. He stayed there in seclusion for about a month and a half and silently pursued

his Sadhana of Yoga. He did not find the place very convenient however, and on the 4th of April 1910, went by “Dupleix” to Pondicherry.

A very petty-minded allegation was made by the authorities that Aurobindo left Indian territory to avoid arrest. Aurobindo issued a statement in the “Madras Times” that he had retired to Pondicherry in response to a call for the pursuit of higher Yoga and that the warrant which he was alleged to have tried to avoid was actually issued after he reached Pondicherry! Moreover, when the government pursued the matter by prosecuting the printer of the “open letter”, which was responsible for the warrant issued for Aurobindo’s arrest, the result vindicated Aurobindo. It is true, the printer was convicted in the lower court but Justice Woodroffe and Justice Fletcher of the High Court acquitted him and declared that “the open letter” was not at all seditious!

CHAPTER VI

TO PONDICHERRY AND—

IN this chapter I shall detail some of the more important facts and events during Aurobindo’s stay in Pondicherry. An account of his Sadhana is reserved for a subsequent chapter.

After hectic activity for about ten months, Aurobindo moved to a permanent abode at Pondicherry. It proved to be at once a sanctuary, and an Ashram for his unique Sadhana and exceptional Siddhi. It became a centre from which radiated the new gospel of Integral Yoga as well as a home for those who sought new life and light. It turned out to be a place of pilgrimage for the numerous men and women who were attracted by his great teaching. Finally,

it developed into a Yoga-bhoomi (a place for Yoga practices) for hundreds of intense Sadhaks and into a laboratory for building a new humanity on fresh foundations. In addition, it is now a temple where the sacred remains of the Master rest, after his great soul chose to depart from its mortal coil to find a pivotal point in the Infinite.'

For forty long years, Aurobindo lived in this French-Indian (now wholly Indian) seaside town. But can we really say that he actually spent those years in that town or in that house or in those houses? It might well be that his body was there the whole time. But his consciousness was an unrestrained and yet purposeful wanderer in the realms of the spirit exploring new regions and hewing fresh paths. In fact, he lived mostly in the inner world, probing into its innumerable mysteries, taking measure of the depths of consciousness. That was the world of which he was most conscious and about which he was most inquisitive. All else for him were outer trappings, mere names and forms, only manifestations. What mattered to him was the essence, the spirit, the ground, that which, without "itself changing was the cause of this eternally changing world". No doubt, at the beginning of his career other things had absorbed him. But the inner promptings and the decisive urges of his heart were always there, and ultimately they drove him to the exclusive domain of the spirit, which claimed him as if he were its permanent denizen. It welcomed him as the proverbial prodigal son. Many attempts were made to tempt him back to the world, especially to the field of politics. Great need was often felt for a leader of his calibre. Lala Lajpat Rai also invited him. In 1920 Joseph Baptista offered him the editorial chair of a new nationalist journal to be published in Bombay. Chittaranjan again tried to persuade him to return in 1922, but Aurobindo told him that he was after a higher reality and that if he should return, it would be after attaining a

new poise which would help him to give a fresh orientation to everything. Bengal asked him to return after Chittaranjan's passing when there was a vacuum. Rabindra, who had warmly greeted him in 1908, now in 1928 personally told him that everyone was waiting for his word. He had but to say it and all would follow. The Mahatma also made an attempt to recall him by sending as a special messenger his own son Devdas. The Congress Gadi was ready for him. But nothing could lure him back. The work that he was absorbed in was so intense, of such universal significance, so integral, and so important from his point of view that he thought fit to ignore the highest importunities and to continue along the course he had adopted. Judging from where we are today, we cannot but say that India and the world are by far richer for his continuance of the great Sadhana. Although apparently inactive, all these forty years in Pondicherry, he was intensely and inwardly active. The full history of that period in his life can now never be written. But it represented one continuous, great and epic struggle against all the anti-evolutionary forces of life. It was as a result of this strenuous struggle that Aurobindo evolved the philosophy of the Life Divine, discovered the unique path of Integral Yoga, and laid the foundations for a human life on a higher plane, namely supramental which is at once subtler, purer, nobler, and intrinsically harmonious.

It is now well-known that very peculiar circumstances attended Aurobindo's departure first for Chandranagore and later for Pondicherry. In Calcutta, there was a constant watch on him, his haunts and his movements. He usually spent the evenings in the offices of "Karmayogin" and "Dharma" which were situated at No. 4, Shyamapukur Lane. Sometimes he indulged there in his favourite hobby, the planchette. It was more with a view to studying its working than with a view to seeing what the auto-writing was. He

already had strong promptings, in the midst of all his work, to leave his journalistic and other activities in favour of higher Yoga.

One day in February 1910, when in his office Ramachandra Muzumdar, an employee, suddenly brought word to him that the office was going to be raided and himself arrested. Such rumours were neither new nor extraordinary. Although it was known that there was no warrant against Aurobindo, somehow on that day, he heard an urgent "voice" which told him to go to Chandranagore. Within ten minutes, Aurobindo and two of his companions were on a boat and on their way. They reached Chandranagore on the next day! Before leaving, the only arrangement he made was to send a note to Nivedita asking her to edit "Karmayogin". This she did in his absence. Aurobindo's detachment was so complete that once he left Calcutta, he did not write a single line for the paper.

Motilal Roy made all the arrangements for his secret stay in Chandranagore. He was there for about a month and a half and went into deep Sadhana.

It should be noted here that during these days, except for two or three persons, none, not even officers of the government, knew the whereabouts of Aurobindo. He saw no one. He had only one servant who carried food to him. During his stay, the plan of the Pravartak Sangh was made and till 1920, it was worked out directly by Roy, under the general guidance of Aurobindo. But in that year, differences in ideology arose. The Sangh thenceforward continued under Roy's exclusive leadership.

At the end of March, Aurobindo received an inner call to proceed to Pondicherry. Soon arrangements were made for his departure. He had to take the steamer from Calcutta and did so under an assumed name, Jyotindranath Mitra. A number of difficulties arose and at one time delay seemed

inevitable. But ultimately he reached Pondicherry at the beginning of April. All along, his attitude had been one of supreme indifference. His companions could see that there was no sign of care or anxiety about him. "He was quite firm, unmoved and steady. He sat almost like a statue, as if in meditation". Nagen Guharay writes, "I had heard of him no doubt. But here I could see him without the least care or anxiety. He was free from fear. He was wholly detached".

In Pondicherry, there were already a few self-exiles from the South, notably the Tamil poet Subrahmanya Bharati, Srinivasachari and Krishnamachari. A Tamil weekly "India" was being conducted from there. At first, the exiles did not believe Motilal Roy's messenger when he told them that Aurobindo was on his way there. They feared that it might be police trickery and therefore did not take the message seriously. Ultimately however, as an emergency measure, it was arranged that Aurobindo should stay at Shankar Chetty's house in Komti Street. Bharati and others received him at the port on the 4th of April 1910. He was taken to and lived in Chetty's house till October.

As before, the move to Pondicherry was kept a guarded secret. In the beginning, poet Bharati and others requested Aurobindo to join them in with the political work they were doing. But he was then completely absorbed in Yoga and so begged to be excused. He would not see anybody without some important cause. He lived on the first floor and came down but once a day for his bath. He had three companions Moni, Bejoy and Sourin. Nolini joined them next year. They all worked for him and served him.

Comparatively, they all lived a very hard life. All except Aurobindo slept on the ground. One of the companions would prepare tea for him twice a day, once in the morning and once in the afternoon. The host was a vegetarian and

supplied at noon a simple lunch consisting of rice, vegetables, rasam (tamarind soup), and sambhar (dal-curry). In the evenings, a cup of kheer or payas (milk pudding) was usually taken by Aurobindo. Without offending the religious sentiments of the household, his companions sometimes feasted Aurobindo on an egg preparation.

In October, Aurobindo moved to another of Shankar Chetty's houses in the south of the town. There he paid some rent till about April 1911. The self-help arrangement of cooking in turn, continued. They could now partake of meat and fish. There was hardly any furniture, except a camp-cot, two chairs and a table. A servant was engaged only after "Arya" was started in 1914!

During the year, Paul Richard visited Pondicherry for the first time in connection with his election to the Chamber of Deputies. In this however, he failed. He met Aurobindo and for two days spent several hours with him. His first impression was, that Aurobindo was as near to him as an elder brother and was a man of vast intelligence. In 1918, he hailed Aurobindo as the coming leader of Asia in his book "Dawn over Asia".

An interesting incident regarding Mira Richard (Mrs. Paul Richard), a Sadhika from a very early age, may be mentioned here. She sent with Paul Richard a few queries regarding Yoga. One of them enquired about the significance of the vision of a lotus. Aurobindo told Paul that it was the symbol of the awakening of the inner consciousness and was usually seen when the mind was on a subtler plane.

It may be noted here that it was on the 29th of March 1914 that Mira met and spoke with Aurobindo at Pondicherry for the first time. She entered in her diary on the following day as follows:—"He whom we saw yesterday is on earth; his presence is enough to prove that a day will come when

darkness shall be transformed into light, when Thy reign shall be indeed established on earth”.

The visit in the same year of K. V. Rangaswami, zamindar of Kodyaram near Trichinopoly, is another event worth mentioning. He came to seek Aurobindo because his family Guru, Yogi Nagai Japta, had predicted the coming of a Mahayogi from the north and had advised him to seek that yogi's spiritual guidance. When on the eve of his passing he was asked how the Mahayogi was to be recognised, he said that he would come south to escape some difficulties and that three of his characteristics would already have been advertised. This description fitted Aurobindo. The three characteristics were those which he had already mentioned in his August letter to Mrinalini and they had been published. Rangaswami saw Aurobindo occasionally. It is known that he offered some financial help. As a result of their relationship, a book was published by Rangaswami at his own cost called “Yogic Sadhana”, which had been dictated when the planchette was invoked. The author's note is signed “Uttar Yogi” and was written by Aurobindo himself, but as he was not the direct author of the book, its publication was discontinued after 1927.

Nothing of great importance happened till the publication of the “Arya” on 15th August, 1914. But some facts are worth noting. He continued his Sadhana and seldom went out of the house. It was a great event for instance, when he went to the house of Shrinivasachari for the marriage of his daughter.

Financial difficulties continued. Houses had to be often changed. It was only after starting the “Arya” that he was able to continue his stay in one house which he did from 1914 to 1922. He could just spare about ten rupees per month for books. Meat and fish was not tasted sometimes for days together. Publication of his books was made

by the Pravartak Sangh. But there was not much sale in the beginning.

There were two events during this period which go to show that the police of the British government were still after the blood of Aurobindo. One was a house search. An agent provocateur had falsely written to the police regarding revolutionary literature which, he claimed, was being produced and stored by Shrinivasachari, V. V. S. Iyer and others. It was also suspected that they had contacts with the exiles and revolutionaries who were abroad, such as Shyamji Krishnavarma and Madame Cama. A French Police officer searched Aurobindo's house. He found nothing incriminating. To his astonishment, he found Greek and Latin manuscripts written by Aurobindo. This filled the officer with admiration for Aurobindo and he became his friend.

Another attempt to find some evidence against Aurobindo was made when one Beerendra Roy, a spy of the British government obtained entry into the house as a domestic servant to a T.B. patient, who had come to seek help from Aurobindo. After months of stay, the spy confessed his business to Aurobindo and afterwards ran away. He solemnly declared however, that he had not made reports against either Aurobindo or anybody else in the party.

The year 1914 was very important since it was then that Mira and Paul Richard made a long stay in Pondicherry which gave time for their friendship to develop. On 29th March, Mira had a long talk with Aurobindo. Paul proposed that they should start a monthly philosophical review; a decision was taken on the 1st of June, and "Arya" was the result. The Richard agreed to bear all initial expenses. The paper started with a subscribers' list of two hundred and later became self-supporting.

During this same year, Mother (Mira Richard) visited Aurobindo in the afternoons and sometimes took coconut

sweets for him. She would prepare cocoa for him and Richard would also be there to share it with all. Every Sunday, Aurobindo and his house party dined with the Richards.

It was also in 1914 that Aurobindo translated into English "Sāgar Sangeet", Bengali songs by Chittaranjan Das. Unasked, Das paid one thousand rupees for the work.

Aurobindo read his papers at about 9 a.m. in the morning and saw visitors between 10 and 11 a.m. Lunch was served between 12 and 12-30 p.m. In the evenings, it became usual for the poet Bharati, Shrinivasachari and others to call for conversation. This means that the rule of strict seclusion to which Aurobindo had resorted during earlier years had now slackened. On some important occasions, he visited the homes of friends and important Frenchmen, such as the Mayor of the city. He opened the "Aryan Stores", which was financially supported by the Richards.

Though Aurobindo's financial situation had eased since 1914, it cannot be said that there was much added comfort to his way of life. For about six years, he lived in a house which did not boast of a bath; all bathed under the only running tap.

In February 1915, a call for Paul to render military service came from the French government. He had to respond. Mira went away with him. They were not to return for the next few years.

The year 1920 was a very important one. It brought about Barindra's release. The Richards returned to Pondicherry. An offer to Aurobindo was made by Tilak through Joseph Baptista to edit a new English nationalist paper in Bombay. The now famous replies to Barindra's and Baptista's letters written by Aurobindo in that year explain his position very clearly. The coming of Mother brought about a thorough overhaul of the household arrangements. She

returned on April 24, 1920, and began to wear the Sari, in Indian fashion, from June.

Generally, things brightened after Mother's arrival at Aurobindo's residence in Pondicherry. Food arrangements improved. A bath was provided on the upper storey for Aurobindo. The Ashram did not properly start till 1926, but the number of visitors and other activities now began to increase.

Barindra came to see Aurobindo in 1921 and they decided to start a spiritual centre in Bhowanipur in Calcutta. It was opened, but unfortunately did not continue for long. William Pearson from Santiniketan, James Cousins, Sarala Chodhurani, Dr. Munje, Avinash Bhattacharya of "Bande Mataram" days, Colonel Josiah Wedgewood of the British Parliament, were some of the prominent people to visit Aurobindo in the course of 1920-21. His sister Sarojini went to him in 1921. In the way of financial help, he gave to her the publication rights of "War and Self-determination". Sadhaks by now, began to come and stay round about in independent houses.

The simple daily routine of Aurobindo at that time was to take two cups of tea at 7 a.m. and three slices of bread and butter. He lunched at 11-30 after his bath—Aurobindo was always the last to bathe. Afternoon tea was taken at 3-30 p.m. and dinner served at 9-30 p.m.

The several people who stayed with Aurobindo about July 1920, included Barindra, Mother, Rishikesh Kanjilal, Rameswar De, Natwardas, Amrita and Miss Hudson. Nolini, Indulekha and Moni returned from Bengal in August.

As the number of inmates increased, the question of food and taste became more and more complicated. Aurobindo on one occasion said to a Sadhak, "One should not insist on a particular kind of food of a particular taste. There is no substance in such insistence. You have a body

and you have to maintain it in good condition. Inferior types of food weaken and spoil the body. Therefore, good food should be eaten. Good food means good for the body, not that which is good for taste.”

He considered that oil, soap and such other things were necessities but tobacco was not.

Amarendra Chatterji, an associate of the revolutionary days, had taken Sanyas and was now “Kevalanand”. He was working with groups in Tanjore and other places. Aurobindo had received reports that some people were preaching his philosophy in those parts. One day, this Sanyasi whose name in the old days was “Gabriel”, presented himself and his troupe. Aurobindo recognised him immediately and he stayed there for some time. He was advised not to continue revolutionary activities.

At this time, arrangements were made with the Pravartak Sangh of Chandranagore and Arya Publishing House, Calcutta, for the publication of Aurobindo’s books.

K. G. Deshpande, Aurobindo’s Cambridge friend, who was now in charge of the Andheri Ashram started in the non-cooperation days, also came to meet Aurobindo.

When C. R. Dass started the Swaraj Party in 1923, he asked for Aurobindo’s blessing, which was given. He then had some idea of exclusively devoting himself to Sadhana, but Aurobindo dissuaded him from doing so and asked him not to leave, the political field.

In 1922, Mother took entire charge of Aurobindo’s household and organised it very systematically. After 1926, when Aurobindo had entirely retired from the world, she re-organised it on an Ashram basis. That continues even today.

Lala Lajpat Rai with Purushottam Das Tandon visited Pondicherry in 1925 and had long talks with Aurobindo.

Very few details are available from 1926 onwards. We know that in 1938, his knee was suddenly flexed and he was

ill for a long time. The foregoing events have been included here to give the reader some general idea of the happenings throughout this period.

Two of the important persons who saw Aurobindo during 1924 were Dilip and Kapali Shastry. Both have since played very significant roles. Kapali Shastry, who was a profound Sanskrit scholar, records a very lovely shine on the skin of Aurobindo. He attributes it to Yogic Sadhana.

The day of Siddhi, the 24th of November 1926, at last arrived. There were twenty-four Sadhaks present and their names are given on page 97 of "Dakshina" dated November 1951.

From this day, Aurobindo retired into complete seclusion and for years continued his outside contacts only through the Mother. She took charge of the whole Ashram.

I should here revert to the "Arya" and note a few details as this was his most important work during 1914-20.

The journal certainly contained contributions from Paul and Mira Richard as well as others. But the whole soul and spirit of the magazine was contained in the weighty contributions from the pen of Aurobindo. He started a series of sequences, namely, Essays on the Gita, Life Divine, Synthesis of Yoga, The Secret of the Veda, The Ideal of Human Unity, A Defence of Indian Culture, The Psychology of Social Development, and so on. Thus every month readers were allowed an insight into the highly spiritual and mature mind of Aurobindo. The articles treated subjects of philosophy, religion, ethics, sociology, art, culture, literature, and so forth. Some of them have now been revised, edited and published in book-form. Many of them undoubtedly are permanent contributions to world-thought, in addition to their being almost the last word in the presentation of Indian thought.

If Aurobindo's contributions to "Yugantar" and

“Bande Matram” were replete with a vigorous nascent nationalism of an inspired patriot, comparable to those of Giuseppe Mazzini, if his writings in the “Karmayogin” and “Dharma” embodied the activist philosophy of an intensely patriotic Vedantin, the outpourings—they were not laboured, as we know—in “Arya” were a consummate and complete picture of a vision of humanity, of an integral philosophy, and of the technique of Sadhana drawn by a Yogi perched on the dizzy heights of resplendent spirituality. To Aurobindo, the term Arya does not signify a race or a caste. To him, an Arya is one who breaks the ground, who is valorous, who is the indefatigable aspirant. An Arya is a conqueror of everything that comes in the way of the ever mounting spiral of evolution. “For, in everything, he (Arya) seeks truth, in everything right, in everything height and freedom....”.

The “Arya” started with a twofold object mentioned below, which was amply fulfilled:—

1. A systematic study of the highest problems of existence.

2. The formation of a vast synthesis of knowledge, harmonizing the diverse religious traditions of humanity, occidental as well as oriental. Its method will be that of a realism, at once rational and transcendental, a realism consisting in the unification of intellectual and scientific disciplines with those of intuitive experience.

It also explained its ideal in the following words: “Unity for the human race by an inner oneness and not only by an external association of interests; the resurgence of man out of the merely animal and economic life or the merely intellectual and aesthetic into the glories of the spiritual existence; the pouring of the power of the spirit into the physical mould and mental instrument so that man may develop his manhood into that true Supermanhood which shall exceed our present state as much as this exceeds the

animal state from which Science tells us that we have issued. These three are one; for man's unity and man's self-transcendence can come only by living in the spirit."

His philosophy was based on intuitive experience and the object of his writing was to convey to the reader that experience, and invite him to attain the heights to which these and similar experiences led. He had no interest in intellectual things unless they were capable of transforming life and of leading to effective action. Therefore, his Ashram did not become a journalist's office or develop into a mere library. It had a natural growth and the time soon came when organisation became necessary. It is remarkable that even after the passing away of the Master, there has not been the least slackening in the organisation or discipline of the Ashram. In course of time, it attracted more and more sincere Sadhaks who were bent on seeking the truth in the way Aurobindo pointed out.

It is given to all, and to every youthful mind especially, to dream without restraint and to imagine even the impossible. But it is seldom given to anyone to realise his dreams, even partially. In the case of Aurobindo, however, we had a person who, in the course of a long and intensive life, not only saw some of his dreams realised but also played himself a very important role in their realisation. His statement on the 15th of August 1947, the day of India's Independence, is worthy of perusal and study.

It was the day of his seventy-seventh birthday as well as the day of the declaration of India's Independence ("Mother India," Feb. 1952, P. 7,) :—

"On this day I can watch almost all the world-movements which I hoped to see fulfilled in my lifetime, though then they looked like impracticable dreams, arriving at fruition or on their way to achievement....

“The first of these dreams was a revolutionary movement which would create a free and united India....

“Another dream was for the resurgence and liberation of the peoples of Asia and her return to her great role in the progress of human civilization.

“The third dream was a world-union forming the outer basis of a fairer, brighter and nobler life for all mankind. That unification of the human world is under way; there is an imperfect initiation organised but struggling against tremendous difficulties. But the momentum is there and it must inevitably increase and conquer....

“A catastrophe may intervene and interrupt or destroy what is being done, but even then the final result is sure. For unification is a necessity of Nature, an inevitable movement. Its necessity for nations is also clear, for without it the freedom of the small nations may be at any moment in peril and the life even of the large and powerful nations insecure. The unification is therefore in the interests of all, and only human imbecility and stupid selfishness can prevent it; but these cannot stand for ever against the necessity of Nature and the Divine will. But an outward basis is not enough; there must grow up an international spirit and outlook, international forms and institutions must appear, perhaps such developments as dual or multilateral citizenship, willed interchange or voluntary fusion of cultures. Nationalism will have fulfilled itself and lost its militancy and would no longer find these things incompatible with self-preservation and the integrality of its outlook. A new spirit of oneness will take hold of the human race.

“Another dream, the spiritual gift of India to the world, has already begun. India's spirituality is entering Europe and America in an ever increasing measure. That movement will grow; amid the disasters of the time, more and more eyes are turning towards her with hope and there is

even an increasing resort not only to her teachings but to her psychic and spiritual practice.

“The final dream was a step in evolution which would raise man to a higher and larger consciousness and begin the solution of the problems which have perplexed and vexed him since he first began to think and to dream of individual perfection and a perfect society. This is still a personal hope and an idea, an ideal which has begun to take hold both in India and in the West on forward-looking minds. The difficulties in the way are more formidable than in any other field of endeavour, but difficulties were made to be overcome and if the Supreme Will is there, they will be overcome. Here too, if this evolution is to take place, since it must proceed through a growth of the spirit and the inner consciousness, the initiative can come from India and, although the scope must be universal, the central movement may be hers.

“Such is the content which I put into this date of India’s liberation; whether or how far this hope will be justified depends upon the new and free India.”

While Aurobindo’s activities in the higher regions continued, his body unfortunately became a victim to kidney trouble. He resisted the attack and kept it in check for a long time. But eventually, for reasons known only to himself, he surrendered his body and passed into regions unknown and unfathomed on the 5th December, 1950.

I cannot resist the temptation here of quoting a spontaneous tribute paid on this occasion to this great Mahayogi of India by one of her noblest sons and the first citizen of the Republic of India, Dr. Rajendra Prasad. He wrote to me as follows on 5-12-50 from the Rashtrapati Bhavan, New Delhi:—

“I was grieved to hear of the message of the demise of Shri Aurobindo which you left for me this morning.

“A bold and intrepid thinker, like the Rishis of old, Shri Aurobindo was also a man of action. Deeply read in western literature, he took to a study of the rich lore of his land of birth, but he was not a student in the ordinary sense of the world. His study of the written and spoken scriptures was reinforced and tested by prolonged and ceaseless *sadhana*. His body will no longer be seen, even by the fortunate few, on the few special days in the year, but the message he has left, and the aroma of spiritualism he has shed, will continue to inspire generations yet unborn, not only in this land but also the world at large. India will worship and enshrine his memory and place him in the pantheon of its great seers and prophets”.

Some might imagine that when in 1910 Aurobindo left the active field of politics, he shut himself up in an ivory tower and spun thoughts in a world of unreality and of imagination. But quite the contrary was the case. He was extremely alive to what was going on and alert to the very tips of his fingers. To a certain extent, he was in an advantageous position in that he could pool his experiences and observations on life in a cool and detached manner and base a philosophy of action on them, away from the passions and prejudices of the times. His writings, especially on art, literature, poetry, and culture, reveal the wide grasp he had, of movements not only in India but in the whole world. He was up-to-date in his knowledge of scientific development and his perspective was ever universal and it embraced the whole of humanity. The more he sought seclusion and physical isolation, the more subtle and sensitive he became in his consciousness. Thus spirit and matter, east and west, idealism and realism, idea and action, were equally and simultaneously present to him when he dealt with any problem of life. It was this approach and attitude that led

him to an integral view and to a synthesised solution. He thought and lived and wrote and carried on Sadhana for the whole of humanity and gave a call to everyone to be prepared for the next step in evolution which was imminent. That next step, he visualized, was as great a leap above and beyond humanity as humanity itself was above and beyond the ape-life. His clarion call was not only for the divinization of oneself but for the divine to be brought into humanity, so that it might be raised to a higher level and a subtler and purer consciousness.

CHAPTER VII

HIS UNIQUE CONTRIBUTION

I HAVE attempted so far a brief outline of Aurobindo's life in the foregoing chapters. The next and subsequent ones will be devoted mainly to his Sadhana, Siddhi, and teachings. Before proceeding further, I would like to acquaint the readers with the special contribution that he may be said to have made in some other fields.

I have referred to many of his activities and said that the story of each one of them may well fill a volume. Here my ambition is humbler and I crave the indulgence of the readers to be satisfied with a somewhat cursory treatment of this subject. I am not out to measure the colossus but shall feel amply repaid if I can but lay my tiny wreath on its feet.

Aurobindo has to his credit a very remarkable record as a great scholar and man of letters. He has written voluminously and on a variety of subjects. His great originality, his rare mastery over the material he handles, and his inspired language invest his writings with a quality and dignity which is very conspicuous. The subjects that he

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has specially written about are literature, politics, spirituality, philosophy, culture, yoga and sociology. In almost every one of these subjects his contribution has been unique. It has distinctly advanced the thought of the age on that subject. Apart from his Greek and Latin scholarship and his poems in those languages, his English poems and other writings have a sweep and a depth which is very striking. His muse takes wings long before the reader even thinks of flying. He often creates an atmosphere that is almost ethereal. His "Savitri" is a literary marvel. The name and the basic story is borrowed from one of the most popular classical narratives in which Sanskrit abounds. A sustained web of allegory is woven round it, his own visions and inner experiences serving as the delicate warp and woof. None but such great poems as Dante's "Divina Comedia" or Milton's "Paradise Lost" can be mentioned in the same breath with it. In one respect, however, it far surpasses what has ever been written on this subject. Here what we come across is not merely any conventional story or tradition of a great race, raised to the pitch of epic height and clothed in the dignity of noble imagery. These are really necessary for all high-class poetry. While reading "Savitri", we are led far beyond and behind the floating universe into the very secret chambers of the original creative will, and then along the eternal pilgrim's uncharted path to those remote reaches of consciousness which have remained unexplored, or at any rate unexpressed and unexplained since the very birth of humanity. The mere attempt to understand fully the deeper meanings and the subtler implications involved, is often blinding. At times the reader has to turn back, rest a while and try to scale the heights again step by step, because at such places, each word is an image of a vivid vision and each line a rare, frozen truth of experience. One is at a loss to know how to characterize this poem of poems. It is a

meeting-ground of the vision of a seer, the voice of a prophet, the inspiration of a poet, and the technique of an artist. All have blended in a superhuman effort here to enrich and embellish the saga of an earnest soul in quest of the Eternal.

Aurobindo's deep scholarship is nowhere more obvious than in his new interpretation and revealing commentary on the Vedas, the Upanishads, and the Gita. His writings in this connection are not merely intellectual feats. They show us his power to enter into the very spirit of the Rishis and seize the inner connotation of ancient words and expressions. Most of the Vedic scholars have said that the Riks are but inspired babblings of infant humanity. Only Madhvacharya in his *Rigbhashya* (12th Cent. A.D.) asserts that all Riks have a triple meaning. Sayana emphasised a ritualistic interpretation. Personification, anthropomorphism and a prayerful mood induced by elemental desires and a healthy fear of the awesome happenings in the skies, these and similar are the *raison d'être* according to many Indologists, of the full-throated outpourings of the Aryan patriarchs. But Aurobindo differs from them radically. He does not merely say that the Vedic Mantras tend themselves to an esoteric meaning also, which was perhaps open only to the initiates. He states that to the eye of those inspired seers a body of truth was revealed which took the shape of virile poetry clothed in gorgeous imagery of nature herself. It is not by courtesy nor as only a by-product that the psychological and spiritual meaning permeates some of the important Riks. It is there by its own right and because the Rishis meant it. How else and in what context could Agni—Fire, be called *Jāta-veda* (a knower)? How can the daily dawn in the east be said to help the Rishis in 'crossing over to the other shore of this darkness', for which they express their gratefulness? Aurobindo's thesis is in brief as follows:—

“In the age of Veda or in Egypt, the spiritual achieve-

ment or the occult knowledge was confined to a few, it was not spread in the whole mass of humanity. The mass of humanity evolves slowly, containing in itself all stages of evolution from the material and the vital man to the mental man. A small minority pushed beyond the barriers, opening the doors to occult and spiritual knowledge and preparing the ascent of the evolution beyond mental man into spiritual and supra-mental being'', and again,

‘‘Here in India the reign of Intuition came first. Intellectual mind developing afterwards in the later philosophy and science.... The Vedic age was followed by a great outburst of intellect and philosophy which yet took spiritual truth as its basis and tried to reach it anew, not through a direct Intuition or occult process as did the Vedic seers, but by the power of the mind’s reflective, speculative, logical thought; at the same time processes of Yoga were developed which used the thinking mind as a means of arriving at spiritual realisation spiritualising this mind itself at the same time. Then followed an area of the development of philosophies and Yoga processes which more and more used the emotional and aesthetic being as the means of spiritual realisation and spiritualised the emotional level in man through the heart and feeling.’’

What I have said above regarding his originality and scholarship in connection with Vedic interpretation, applies equally to his writings on the Upanishads and the Gita. His observations on the Ramayana and Mahabharata, as well as on the works of some classical Sanskrit poets show his wide perspective and his capacity to capture the very soul of such huge epics.

As a literary critic, his tendency is highly constructive. Not that he could not wield a devastating pen. He did it

on occasions, when for instance, he demolished William Archer's criticism of Indian art. But that happened rarely. His approach was always broad, catholic, and synthetic. His essays on "Future Poetry" are monuments of his global sweep, sympathetic understanding of the poetry of other countries and in different languages.

Aurobindo's special contribution to the political life of the country when he actively participated in it, will ever remain a brilliant chapter in India's struggle for freedom. It was the politics of patriotism, the politics of a country fighting for its very life, in which he was called upon to play his noble part. There was hardly any scope for power-politics which normally vitiates the atmosphere and gives rise to jealousies and low intrigues. It was all a matter of more and more selfless service, greater and greater sacrifice, and suffering without end. He based his politics not on economics or better government but on the fundamental right of every nation to have its own government. He raised nationalism to the pedestal of a religion and looked upon freedom as a means for the spiritual regeneration of this country. India to him was the Mother, a goddess to be worshipped with the highest devotion and without any thought for self or gain. He was the very picture of the purest form of patriotism. One may as well call his a "Platonic patriotism". He was the first prominent and fearless advocate of unadulterated freedom, without any control by the British. It was under his instructions that the journal "Yugantar" declared (for the first time in India), that it did not recognise the British Court, and as a corollary, refused to defend itself. The same paper ventured to be so bold as to give instructions even in guerilla warfare, to people who may be required to fight for freedom. His writings and speeches were highly inspired and raised the moral tone of the whole of the nationalist party. He laid greater stress on building

up of inner strength than on criticism of the government and other parties. Though he believed that an armed revolution—not mere terrorism—was a legitimate weapon to be used in a country's fight for freedom, and though he maintained his contacts with revolutionary groups almost to the end of his stay in Bengal, he was convinced that an open broadbased agitation on the basis of securing complete national freedom was necessary. He incessantly worked along this line to the last day of his departure to Chandranagore. Ultimately he evolved in concrete terms the formula of non-violent passive resistance. He aimed at the creation of a state within a state which would render the administration of the country by foreigners an impossibility. He visualized that if the resistance and revolt became general, the British would try to compromise and accommodate rather than lose all. His political writings as well as speeches were always simple, direct, and incisive. In those days, they were inspiring and elevating. Even today they are illuminating, and illustrative of his originality of thought, fervour of patriotic feeling, and simple dignity of diction. They will repay reading any time since they retain even now their freshness and flavour.

Sometimes people speak of Aurobindo as a great journalist. But we must remember that he was a journalist of a kind. If Tilak, Lajpatrai, and Gandhi are to be designated as journalists, certainly he too was a journalist and a very powerful and efficient one at that. But I do not think that we should name these people as journalists simply because they wrote in journals or conducted them. They were far too much more than journalists. They were the missioned of great ideals. Aurobindo had a mission of which he was always highly conscious. Newspapers came handy as vehicles of thought and he used them with marvellous effect. Truthful, clean, honest, inspired writing in the cause of freedom and the

all-sided regeneration of India based on spiritual revitalization, and latterly the divinization of mind, life and matter, were the aims which were sacred to him and next to his heart. He endeavoured to fulfil these aims through newspapers, leaflets, booklets, books, letters, conversations, talks, speeches, contemplation, action, and invoking the Supermind. If in the course of this herculean effort and high mission, he had to play a small part as a journalist and a publicist, well, he did it as a master-hand at it. The impress that he has left by his work at the editor's table is worthy of becoming the highest ideal for journalists, but at the same time it is an ideal which can hardly and rarely be reached without a spiritual background.

He would yield to none in his love of Indian culture. His appreciation and assessment of it is not that of a mere partisan. He values it more as representative of the human trend towards spirituality and inner development, as different and distinct from that towards materiality and external achievement. His evaluation of the West was balanced. He stood for a broad synthesis of the two and strove hard to work out such a synthesis not only in the thought-world but also in a concrete society round himself. The East and the West are in fact, complementary. Romain Rolland, writing in 1924, invoked Asia saying, "Teach us to understand all things, Asia, teach us your knowledge of life! And learn of us action, achievement!"

Mutual accusations by advocates of the cultures of East and West are not uncommon. William Archer, an art-critic, once stumbled into the folly of unrestrained and unbridled vituperation against Indian art and culture. He stigmatized India as uncivilized and barbarous. Sir John Woodroffe, "Arthur Avalon" of Tantra fame, came out with a rejoinder, "Is India civilized?" This was the occasion which provoked

Aurobindo into bursting out in the famous sequence, "Defence of Indian Culture" which appeared serially in "Arya". The whole body of adverse criticism and condemnation of India and her culture stood up before him when he took up the pen to defend her. India is once and again accused of escapism, other-worldliness, unrealism, and weakness in action. Her religion is often characterized as a mass of superstition, her philosophy as anaemic, her metaphysics as intellectual cobwebs, her social system as a wilderness of taboos with regard to food and marriage. It may well be said that Aurobindo's defence is classical. His whole soul rises against the various charges. He first scores out the points of criticism and then builds up a superstructure which is essentially constructive. He marshalls from the long and eventful history of India, the mighty figures who have contributed substantially not only to India but to the world. And this contribution ranges over every field of human activity and along some three thousand years of continued, vigorous, and vital existence. India, he would emphasise, is contributing even today and now.

With all this great and enthusiastic defence of India and her culture, Aurobindo always looks at India in the perspective of the world, of humanity and its progress. Peace, harmony, joy are the cherished ideals of all. But he does not believe that these can be established by individual, social or political action, however powerful and persistent it might be. A kind of peace among nations might be enforced but it will be of the type that reigns within an organised state. Such peace and order are the result of curbing anarchic force by legal force. Nothing more than that. Without a revolutionary change in human nature, real and intrinsic peace can never reign supreme in the world. What is required therefore is a spiritual evolution and a psychological revolution. It is only these that can

form a stable basis for 'peace on earth and goodwill unto men'. Without these inner changes, 'the pyramid may be made to stand on its apex, but it is only for a short while.' In this masterly writings "The Human Cycle" and "The Ideal of Human Unity", Aurobindo has expressed his considered views as regards the human family and its future. He envisaged the coming of the superman with his basis in the supermind. This alone can ensure the continuous rule of truth and harmony and joy abounding.

With these few words regarding his contribution, I now pass on to his spiritual Sadhana, which I believe is the most important for all humanity.

CHAPTER VIII

SPIRITUAL BACKGROUND

I HAVE taken the reader so far through some of the important biographical details of the remarkable life of Aurobindo. The rest of the book will be devoted to the main features of his unique Sadhana, Siddhi, and teaching.

Aurobindo's achievements in varied fields of activity, such as literature, scholarship, journalism, politics, his contribution to the criticism of art and culture, his unique and powerful advocacy of nationalism, are each of them monumental. Each by itself would live in history. Each achievement would normally require a whole life-time of strenuous endeavour, even on the part of a gifted individual. Each would require a volume for full treatment and proper assessment. But these apart, far greater, much more significant, and still more abiding are the contributions that he made in the field of spiritual Sadhana, Siddhi, and profound philosophy. Like a great pioneer, and with the daring of an adventurous spirit, he has broken new ground. He has raised

high hopes and shown to humanity the way to transcend itself and transform its future. He has cleared the ground for fresh effort and inspired new faith. In this field especially Aurobindo excelled himself. He worked as the spearhead of the human evolutionary urge and laid humanity under his permanent obligation.

India happens to be old and experienced in spirituality. Her best minds have been those that delved into the depths of human consciousness in an attempt to reach the very end of the eternal quest. But even so, Aurobindo has opened new horizons, "fresh fields and pastures new", by fixing far higher targets for us, other than the familiar ones of individual salvation, merger in the Infinite, detached action, and so on. It is proper, therefore, to deal with the background of his huge effort before going to the subject itself.

While the significance of Aurobindo's Sadhana and Siddhi is high, it is still extremely difficult to write fully or adequately about it, since it has never been, as he has himself remarked, "on the surface". It is comparatively easy to write his biography based on known facts. But it is an extremely difficult task to venture to write about Aurobindo's Sadhana. And yet an effort has to be made to this end since it is his Sadhana which is of the utmost importance, interest, and value to us all. There is now no possibility of his giving us an inner picture and history of his spiritual development. What is written here is obviously inadequate and incomplete and might possibly be also inaccurate in parts. But with all that, an attempt to study the spiritual endeavour of one of the most phenomenal minds of modern times has to be made.

If Aurobindo's Sadhana had been carried on in the ordinary way and in the orthodox style, we need not have given so much attention to it. Nor would it then have required any special mention or treatment. But that is not

the case. As with the Sadhana of Shri Ramakrishna, Aurobindo's Sadhana also had some peculiar features about it. They need a special study. If a complete story could be made available, it would be a contribution to the history of spiritual Sadhana generally. It is possible that peoples' opinions may differ. It is also possible that this brief study may commend itself to some and not to others. But the fact remains that there are special features which are worth noting and studying. It will be proper and more convenient to summarize the special features at the end. In the meanwhile, let us try to appreciate and understand Indian spirituality which is spoken of so much, and the meaning of spiritual Sadhana.

That India has been traditionally rich in spirituality is well-known. It is natural, therefore, that her religion and culture should draw their inspiration from it. But what is significant is that all her activities, including political and economic, are sought to be based on a belief in the immanent existence of the transcended Spirit. Her philosophy has never been an intellectual effort so much as a rationalisation of the intuitive spiritual experience of her great souls. This has sometimes misled western writers into even saying that in the modern western sense, India has no philosophy. This opinion however, is already yielding place to a real recognition of the important position that intuition holds in all philosophy.

Since spirituality has been the real and operative undercurrent in Indian life, it is but logical that the Indian renaissance that burst on her in the latter half of the nineteenth century should have been essentially spiritual in nature. The long line of stalwarts who were pioneers in this renaissance were highly spiritual in their outlook and attitude towards life. From Raja Ram Mohan Roy to Aurobindo, every one of them had a predominantly spiritual background which showed itself prominently, whatever the particular

field in which each of them worked. Aurobindo once definitely declared, "my province is spiritual truth". Nothing mattered to him so much as spirituality.

The fact of Indian spirituality is not something which is known only to Indians. Shrewd and well-known foreign writers and observers have often referred to this matter and endorsed this fact. Some of them have not understood it fully and have expressed some wonder at it, but all recognised that there was something very striking which was not to be found anywhere else. Lowes Dickinson, for instance, in this connection has remarked that he came against something utterly alien in India, which he did not find even in China or Japan.

In a letter written to Dilip on 6th January 1932 about the highly spiritual connotation of words in Sanskrit and other Indian languages, the great poet A.E. (George Russell) wrote, "English is a great language, but it has very few words relating to spiritual ideas.... I am sure the languages which the Hindus speak today must be richer in words fitted for spiritual expression than English, in which there are few luminous words that can be used when there is a spiritual emotion to be expressed....".

Vincent Sheean in his famous book on Gandhi, "Lead Kindly Light", makes the following observations when writing about spirituality and its awareness by the masses of India: "What is distinctive in the broad mass of the Hindu people, as compared to all other great divisions of humanity, is the unquestioning (and largely unthinking) acceptance of transcendental reality in the common consciousness. The Hindu is perhaps born co-conscious with his contemporaries; it sometimes seems as if this may be so; but whether it is or not, he acquires the common consciousness with the growth of his mind and body, so that long before he has learned to formulate his beliefs they are deep

in him, ineradicable by subsequent surface processes such as the scientific knowledge taught in colleges. The universality of the spirit, the participation of each person in it, the transmigration of souls, the ultimate "realization of God" (in the mystical sense) as a possibility for every man born—all these ideas, which are philosophical or religious in the West, are part of the most intimate mind of the most ordinary Hindu. It has been proved to me that even illiterate persons in India know and adhere to the larger concepts which underline and inform all the luxuriant overgrowth of Hinduism, just as the village stone-mason engaged in making an effigy of Hanuman or Ganesh (the monkey-god and the elephant-god) is well aware that these are aspects of the divine without being explicitly God."

Spirituality, a general belief in the Supreme Spirit which pervades and is immanent everywhere and is the *summum bonum* of all existence and is transcendent, is not peculiar only to India. What is specially peculiar is that it is more basic and far more common than elsewhere. It has been the basis of practically all religions in all regions of the world at all times. The expression and description of an existence of the spirit has, no doubt, differed to some extent in scriptures and religious writings. But it is evident even from such differences that the thing referred to and the experiences on which the descriptions are based is the same and is undoubtedly regarded as the Supreme Spirit. The human mind, from the very moment that it turned introspective or subjective, and from the moment that it became speculative, has never been satisfied with considering the world of the senses to be self-explanatory and complete in itself. It has always felt that there is something subtler, higher, nobler, purer and more powerful, at the root of all existence. This feeling is something like the "intimations of immortality" that the poet Wordsworth has so beautifully suggested

in his great poem. This feeling may not be entirely rational but at the same time it cannot be called irrational and dismissed forthwith. It is there, persistent and recurrent, in spite of one's efforts to ignore or outgrow it.

This experience also points to the fact that there is another source of knowledge besides the senses and the faculty of reasoning, which is as valid as any other. This source is usually called "intuition", and knowledge through it is direct, vivid, more compulsive and fills one's being and personality more completely than does any other kind of knowledge. It is derived more by direct identity of the whole of our consciousness with the object of knowledge than by any particular sense or senses or the mind trying to comprehend it.

In the course of its long search, it is mostly through intuition that the human consciousness has come to realize the existence and immanence of the Supreme Spirit. Spirituality consists, therefore, first and foremost in a firm belief in a Supreme Spirit. According to Aldous Huxley in his introduction to "Bhagwat Gita" by Prabhavananda and Isherwood, one of the fundamental doctrines of what he calls Perennial Philosophy is that, "the phenomenal world of-matter and of individualized consciousness—the world of things and animals and men and even of gods—is the manifestation of a Divine Ground within which all partial realities have their being, and apart from which they would be non-existent." This observation very well explains the meaning and the essence of spirituality.

While the Indian mind has in abundance this belief in the Spirit, it is necessary also to note that the stress laid on this belief is so great that it seems to permeate almost every activity, secular as well as religious. In this respect, the Indian mind differs somewhat from others. Through the very long, intense and continuous quest it has carried on, and

even in the dim beginnings of thought, India was never satisfied with only an intellectual statement about the inner experience. She has never believed that thought, logic, learning, or intellect (Na Medhaya Na Bahuna Shrutena) could be the gateway to spirituality. All these may help in their own way but India has always believed that it is intuitive experience, a direct apprehension of truth, that will lay at rest all doubt, cut the knot of bondage in the heart, and establish inner harmony.

Another thing peculiar to India is an intense and all-absorbing urge to live a God-inspired life, to live in the unitive experience of the highest Reality. In the words of the philosopher Zimmer, "the chief aim of Indian thought is to unveil and integrate into consciousness what has been resisted and hidden by the forces of life". This means that for the Indian mind, Spiritual Reality does not exist merely to be apprehended and experienced for a time and to be occasionally and ecstatically enjoyed but to be lived continuously in full awareness. To quote Zimmer again, "The supreme and characteristic achievement of the Brahmin mind (and this has been decisive, not only for the course of Indian Philosophy but also for the history of Indian civilization) was its discovery of the Self (Atman) as an independent imperishable entity, underlying the conscious personality and bodily frame. Everything that we normally know and express about ourselves belongs to the sphere of change, the sphere of time and space, but this Self (Atman) is forever changeless, beyond time, beyond space and the veiling net of causality, beyond measure, beyond the dominion of the eye. The effort of Indian Philosophy has been for millenniums to know this adamant Self and make the knowledge effective in life. . . . Through the vicissitudes of physical change, a spiritual footing is maintained in the peaceful-blissful ground of Atman: eternal, timeless.

and imperishable Being''. Thus to the Indian mind, the apprehension of Spiritual Reality is not a mere abstraction, nor is it only an inner experience, nor is it only an inspiration that occasionally thrills and sends one into a trance, but it is a truth of existence that drives us on to the ultimate target of our evolution, the divine life on earth.

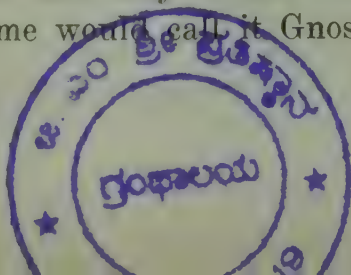
There are some people who misunderstand and misinterpret this stress on spirituality as pessimism, as other-worldliness, as unrealistic jargon, and as something **far** removed from the needs and the demands of our daily life. These critics would have some substantial ground for saying so, if the history of India had been a blank and its multi-sided civilization and culture for the last three thousand years had had no real existence. But it is quite the other way. In no branch of human activity has India shown any indifference or so-called other-worldliness or neglect. It is true that she has produced comparatively more Rishis, more saints, more philosophers, and more religious-minded men. But that is no discredit. In addition, she organised the earliest republics such as those of the Vijjins and the Lichhavis, built empires such as those of Chandragupta, Asoka, Satyashraya Pulakeshi, Vikramaditya, Harshavardhana, Vijayanagar and Shivaji. Her science and arts, industries and commerce till about the eighteenth century were the envy of the world. She sent out religious missions to far off lands and conveyed the message of peace and culture without any political motive or support. She produced by the score great politicians, statesmen, and administrators. She built temples and structures some of which confound even modern engineers. Her architecture and sculpture, her painting and other arts, her music and historic talents have such baffling variety and wide range that it requires decades to study them. Her literature, first in Sanskrit and then in Prakrit, Pali and the regional languages, is rich and varied in

every sense of the word. No epic can stand comparison with the mighty Mahabharat. If these things are the measure of her other-worldliness, then we are not ashamed of it, nor of the worldly achievements that flowed therefrom. But in fact, the world, life and matter have never been shunned or neglected by the Indian mind except in the sense of emphasising that there is "something" beyond all these which includes and comprehends them. This is not all, this is not the end, is the refrain. This is the means, rather. This is the thin yet alluring veil that screens the still more beautiful face of the spirit beyond. The Upanishad in another context says, "a golden lid" covers the very face of Truth. To us all, "becoming", the whole world-process "is the ecstatic dance of Shiva which multiplies the body of God numberlessly to the view: it leaves that pure existence precisely where and what it was, ever is and ever will be; its sole and absolute object is the joy of dancing". To quote Zimmer again in this connection, he says, they (Hindu philosophers) study all that the occidental philosophers study. "India, that is to say, has had, and still has, its own disciples of psychology, ethics, physics, and metaphysical theory. But the primary concern—in striking contrast to the interests of the modern philosophers of the West—has always been not information but transformation: a radical changing of man's nature and, therewith, a renovation of his understanding both of the outer world and of his own existence; a transformation as complete as possible, such as will amount when successful to a total conversion or rebirth". India has laid the greatest emphasis on the discovery and the assimilation of the Self, because ultimately everything that is and happens has a real and vital meaning only in terms of the Reality and our apprehension of it. The attempt has always been, even while one is intensely active, to hold oneself in a state of unmitigated and luminous awareness of the Reality. Many ways and

means and disciplines have been tried and prescribed for this great purpose. In their totality they are called Sadhana. They range from simple worship to highest ecstatic union and include sheer thinking, systematic self-analysis, breath-control, control of the modifications of the mind, dedication, and so on.

The Supreme Spirit, the Brahman, has been variously described in India as Satyam (Truth), Jnanam (Knowledge), Anantam (Infinity) and that which shines in the form of Joy Eternal. (Anandarupam Amritam Yadvibhati). It is also described as Shantam (Peace), Shivam (Auspicious and Good), Advaitam (One-without-a-second), Prapanchopashamam (One in whom the Cosmos itself finds a resting place). It is characterized as Sat (Being), Chit (Consciousness), Anand (Joy). Symbolically, it is indicated by the syllable Aum pronounced as OM with O long. At times, it is described also as Anand (Pure Bliss or Pure Joy). The Upanishad poses a question, "If the Void (Akasha) were not full of joy or Bliss, who could have breathed and lived? "It further asserts that, "it is from Anand that all beings issue forth, in Anand it is that they live and have their existence, towards Anand do they all proceed and into Anand they ultimately merge." It is in this symbolic sense that the eternal joy-intoxicated Dance of Shiva goes on with the cycle of creation, existence and destruction following each other, in infinite and ever-varying succession.

This Divine Ground is not entirely foreign or quite strange to other religions and other thinkers. It might be that the description differs or that characterization varies in certain details. But the basic conception is familiar to all the religious-minded, the mystics, and the seers in different lands. Eckhart and Ruysbroeck would call it the Abyss of God-head. Some would call it Gnosis, others Al Haqq, and so on.



What is important, however, from the point of view of human evolution and endeavour is not merely intellectual knowledge and recognition of the existence of Reality as described above, but belief with one's whole being that it does exist and what is more, that it is possible for human consciousness to reach it and possess it. If one does not believe in the possibility of unitive experience of the God-head or the Divine Ground, it remains a mere concept, an idea without the least influence on the life and the inner being of the aspirant concerned. It is of the utmost significance, therefore, that together with belief in Reality, one must also have belief in the possibility and in one's capacity to reach the Reality by the methods prescribed for so doing. Then alone will the attempt be possible and one day the summit of consciousness will be reached.

It is possible to know and believe in the existence of the Reality and concede also the possibility of unitive experience of it. But the progress of one's effort as well as the completeness of the spiritual experience will always depend on the value one attaches to the endeavour and its success. All spiritual thinkers and mystics have emphasised that it is the highest endeavour a man can and ought to put forth, because it is the highest state of being that one can ever achieve. In the case of India, this experience of identification of the individual self with the Supreme Spirit and the unitive life lived in that experience is looked upon as the final goal of all spiritual endeavour. In fact, it is in this direction that the evolution of the human consciousness is believed to be going on. One begins with individual self-consciousness but the ever expanding concentric circles that one draws as one evolves further and further, leads to the universal consciousness where the individual dwindles merely to a point of reference, without a circumference of its own. The whole of the universe then becomes the circumference. It

has been proved time after time by great souls throughout the ages and in many lands, that it is possible for individuals to reach such a stage of consciousness and to live in the richness and plenitude of that unitive experience of the Supreme Spirit. India has produced such Mahatmas (great souls) again and again to prove that it can be done. Ramana Maharshi, so widely known recently, had attained this state of being. India has honoured and worshipped such men and women through generations. The Indian mind has awe for great kings and administrators, admiration for discoverers and inventors, deep affection for artists and poets but has profound reverence and veneration for its saints and seers, for its sages and Rishis. India knows that it is they who are the vanguard of inner human evolution. Others do help but it is they who bear the burden of leading and directing and guiding the groping human mind from the "unreal to the real". It is they who are ever alert and bear the brunt of battle for the spiritual progress of humanity.

It has already been stated that spirituality and all that it connotes is more or less familiar to all people wherever an inner search has been conducted on any scale. It is a reality higher than the one with which we are ordinarily in contact, namely, the reality of the world of senses. In the course of evolution of human consciousness, man has discovered some long-hidden truths. When once he apprehends the higher truth, he makes it his own and is able to probe further into the mysteries that surround him. It may be said with some justification, that so far, man has generally addressed himself more to the world of senses, to the material world than to the inner world of his own consciousness. In fact, modern research into the working of the human mind is very recent, and still in its infancy. It might indeed transpire that it is in this realm that the unknown secrets even of the world of senses lie. Man is so far only at the

threshold of that far subtler world which is so much with him and yet with which he is so unfamiliar. It is in some important respects in this domain, that India has certainly anticipated others.

Spirituality or the spiritual world is not something external but is rather within our own consciousness; we are within it like specks in a vast and limitless firmament. We have however, to seek it in our consciousness and find it in all its glory. Modern psychology has been trying recently to probe into the mysteries of consciousness, and has found that the sector in which self-consciousness works is very small compared with the vast and unfathomable subconscious and unconscious areas. The field of the unconscious is practically limitless and beyond the ken of the self-conscious, while the sub-conscious is the area which is immediately in touch with the self-conscious. The sub-conscious represents the vast store of all that we have ever thought or left or experienced. It is also that layer of our consciousness where lie in wait our instincts and our elemental urges, not only the individual ones but the universal also. The vast unconscious is really not unconscious except in the sense that we, as self-conscious individuals, are not now aware of it. It lies beyond our self-consciousness and we are not directly in touch with it. But our sub-consciousness as well as self-consciousness float on it as thin surface layers on the bosom of a mighty ocean. It is impersonal while our self-consciousness is extremely personal; our sub-consciousness also reflects something of our personal existence. The aim and attempt of the spiritual aspirant or the Sadhak in India has always been to transcend the area of self-consciousness, to control the sub-conscious and identify himself with the Vast Unconscious which is the Spirit itself. This he has sought to do by self-control, self-purification, concentration, heightening the power of the self-conscious, contemplation and

finally dedication and complete identification with the spirit. The whole of this attempt in the aggregate is called spiritual Sadhana. The consummation is called Siddhi or fulfilment. Thus the Sadhak starts as a novice, goes through the Sadhana, that is spiritual discipline, and attains Siddhi. The Siddha who is the "accomplished one", is no longer imprisoned within the coils and meshes of his individual passions and prejudices; he is in a position to control the storms that sweep over his consciousness from the sub-conscious regions, and being firmly implanted in the Unconscious, enjoys in the depth of his being the infinite calm and the ineffable bliss that is characteristic of the Spirit.

The Spirit, the Being that is immanent and at the same time transcendent manifests itself in numberless forms and in infinite variety. The human being is one such form and the latest in the scale of evolution on this planet. In two different places, the Upanishads have tried at some length to analyse the way consciousness works in the human mind. It is interesting to study these accounts; they are very useful from the practical point of view.

Within the human individual, there are five planes or sheaths of consciousness which are interpenetrating and each of which is progressively subtler and higher than the one preceding it: Annamaya Kosh (matter), Pranamaya Kosh (vital force), Manomaya Kosh (mind-stuff), Vijnanamaya Kosh (super-mind) and Anandmaya Kosh (bliss). The human consciousness can normally move among all these planes. Evolution and effort help the soul to ascend the ladder and occupy the highest plane. It may be compared to a person who resides in a five-storied house. It is for him to decide on which floor to live. All the storeys have their own attraction and respective attachments. The Upanishad points out that he who is learned in the Vedas and at the same time is without attachment, transcends all these planes,

even the Anandmaya Kosh, it asserts. The meaning is that a Siddha is not attached even to the highest, as detachment itself is the greatest attribute of such a status. One who has attained the spiritually highest stage of consciousness continues to have his body, his mind, his personality and all that constitutes a person. But his consciousness is rooted in the Bliss of the Spirit and is not held captive by the various planes of existence within his personality. He is as free as a bird in the sky and roams about as a denizen of all the planes without attachment to any one of them. His is the life of a free soul living in unitive experience of the highest consciousness.

The Upanishad has described in another way the world of consciousness in man. It has mentioned four states of consciousness: the Jagrat (waking consciousness), the Swapna (dream-consciousness), the Sushupti (the sleep-consciousness), and the Turiya (the fourth, i.e., one beyond these). This seems to be a far simpler classification. The first three states are familiar to every one of us. Self-consciousness is most active and prominent in the Jagrat state. The sub-conscious might be said to rule the dream-world without the impediment of the controlling power of self-consciousness. During sleep, however, both are quiescent. They are held in suspense. They are neither active nor inactive. In the Turiya stage, an infinite calm, which is described as peaceful, good, and the very abode of rest, reigns supreme. The Sadhak's attempt always is to reach that state of consciousness. He is then the master of the forces that otherwise rule his consciousness. Mastery of the inner world of consciousness being the highest aim of the spiritual aspirant, he feels gratified only when he attains the Turiya state.

Through the long course of his history, man has sought mainly to establish control and mastery over the forces of nature outside himself, and only slightly to have control over

the powers of consciousness within his own being. This division of forces is not very logical because both act and react and interpenetrate each other with such amazing complicity that logically and scientifically it is wrong even to say that they are two different forces. And yet for practical purposes, it is convenient to recognize a difference. It is then easier for us to deal with them. The Indian mind has given priority to the establishment of an empire (Swarajya) within, but without neglecting the other field, that is, the outside world. The attempts to conquer the outer world can be designated as Adhibhoutik (worldly) Sadhana, and those to conquer the inner world as Adhyatmik Sadhana, or spiritual endeavour. It must, however, be remembered that the Indian mind has not been satisfied by merely demarcating the two and giving greater importance to the latter. It has attempted, and succeeded to a great extent, in co-ordinating and synthesising the two. Within the perspective of the synthesis, it has given to each one its due and created a harmony and an integration which is unique in the history of human thought and action.

In Ishavāsyā, one of the earliest Upanishads, the synthesis is clearly explained. We read, "Those who follow exclusively the path of ignorance, i.e., the path of the material world and of these senses, go to the world of darkness: a still darker world awaits those that follow exclusively the metaphysical world, i.e., the world of abstractions. Different are the destinations of the path of the senses and of the path of abstractions: so have we heard from the thinkers of old who told us. But those who know *that* which is beyond both, namely, the Ground where they are reconciled, conquer the world by following the path of the senses and attain immortality by following the path of abstract knowledge". Thus the Isha Upanishad avers that there is a Reality in which the seeming antithesis between the

outer and the inner world finds a perfect synthesis. The aspirant who possesses the knowledge of that synthesis is in a position to keep his balance and to take the fullest advantage of both paths. He acts integrally and in full knowledge.

We have seen that India has looked upon spiritual truth as the highest truth. The evolutionary urge of the human consciousness and its general direction is towards realizing that Truth of truths. For centuries upon centuries the Indian mind has also thought that living in the unitive experience of the Truth is the highest kind of life. This being so, India has for centuries experimented on scientific lines with the human consciousness and its inner powers and capacity and is now in possession of well-directed paths and systems of spiritual Sadhana. The result has been that India's contribution to spiritual discipline and her technique of Yoga is so varied, so systematic and so perfect that there is hardly any system of spiritual culture in the world which is not familiar to her in one form or another. One still discovers individuals or groups of aspirants in India practising the various methods of Yoga, which proves that none of these systems is in any sense obsolete. They have their own founders of Rishis, their traditions, their Gurus, their technique and their followers. There is one underlying unity, however, in all these systems and that is the unity of aim. All believe that these various roads lead to Anand, to that blissful state of consciousness where "peace that never was on sea or land" reigns supreme. That state is called "Samadhi", where the individual consciousness is merged in the universal, in the One-without-the-second. In the Ashtanga-yoga of Patanjali, Samadhi is mentioned as the eighth and final stage. It is that which every Sadhak aims at reaching in the course of his Sadhana. It is an ecstatic condition, quite indescribable, in which the whole being of the Sadhak is merged in the object of contemplation.

It is not necessary to discuss here the varieties of Samadhi and their characteristics.

Before I begin to write about Aurobindo's Sadhana, it is relevant to investigate how and why an individual is drawn to a spiritual life. We do find that to this life some are more attracted than others. We also find that sometimes certain incidents or experiences in the course of one's life are the cause of a conversion. It is very difficult however, to generalize in this matter, as there seems to be no uniformity in the reasons that lead a person or persons towards spirituality. Sometimes it might be natural tendency, at others an unforgettable experience. It might be one of many causes which give a spiritual turn to one's life. But generally speaking, introverts are more prone towards it than extraverts. The Kathopanishad says that because the Self-Existent Spirit went forth and created this universe, people are prone to look outwards and they are usually engrossed with the world outside. They do not look into their inner self. Very few, it adds, probe into the inner consciousness and try to find the Supreme Self.

The usual reasons, however, why an individual turns towards a spiritual life are subjective more than objective. This inner conversion does not depend so much upon things happening in a particular way as upon the approach and attitude of persons towards incidents or events or experiences. It is often some kind of a shock to one's individuality that makes a person conscious of his own limitations and of the existence of a power besides and beyond himself of which he has to take count. Three kinds of intense agony designated as Trividha Tapa (physical, mental, and that which concerns the personality) are sometimes supposed to arouse and awaken the self-consciousness of man and make him realize his insignificance as an individual. These shatter his egoism and make him feel the existence of "a reality" other than him-

self. Man's consciousness of his own limitations and his awareness of the existence of a Higher Power are the fundamentals necessary for a spiritual life.

Apart from the causes which lead individuals to adopt a spiritual attitude towards life, there are three things that are bound to lead humanity, sooner or later, to the kind of life that is called spiritual. Humanity is definitely on the march in the inner world of consciousness. Natural evolution which has been responsible for bringing man to this stage from that of the ape continues. It now points more than ever to the development not so much of the physical body as of the inner consciousness. The more the human consciousness develops, the more it is bound to incline towards the subtler life of the spirit. The second tendency observable is the quest of the inner truth which is becoming more and more insistent in humanity. This quest is now not satisfied with the truth of the outer world alone. It is insistent upon knowing the sub-conscious and the unconscious and is ambitious of establishing its control and mastery over them. This tendency also points progressively towards a life more of the spirit than of the senses. The third tendency inherent in human consciousness is one which seeks peace, and pure joy through all its activities. This usually leads one from one physical joy to another. But such joy is not unmixed nor constant. That leads to a hunger for eternal joy. Ultimately the human mind is bound to seek that poise of the spirit which alone ensures ineffable and continuous joy. Thus evolutionary forces are gradually but certainly leading humanity towards a kind of life which is nearer spirituality than materiality. The direction is definite though the speed is far more indeterminate and uncertain than one would like it to be.

This brief background regarding spirituality and Sadhana is necessary for fully understanding Aurobindo's

Sadhana. What has been said is neither exhaustive nor complete in detail. It only indicates the course which spirituality and spiritual discipline have run so far, especially in India. But as we have said the science and art of Sadhana is all along evolving with life itself. One must not be surprised therefore to find new trends and fresh departures. There are probably some who consider that the seal is set and one has but to follow what the ancients have said and that there is nothing more or new to be added. This point of view can be logically true only of dead things, not of living ones. No science or art that is alive can utter such a dogma. In fact, it would be fatal for any living science and any creative art to think so. Since spirit is eternal, spirituality is eternal. Since the quest after the spirit by man is eternal, Sadhana too is ever evolving. As man advances, his vision widens, his insight deepens, his search becomes more intense. He is bound to add to the variety of methods by which he has hitherto approached and sought Reality.

It is necessary to make this observation because Aurobindo himself never believed in mere repetitive revival or mechanical imitation of old things. He valued the old, specially the rich and ancient Indian spiritual heritage. But at the same time, he was very careful to emphasize that the best in what is old must be revitalized and used in the form in which it can now fit in, so that it may integrate itself with the onrushing current of our progressive and evolving culture. In fact, Aurobindo was never a slave to orthodoxy and to superstition. The whole history of his spirituality, his Sadhana, his Siddhi, and his teaching though rooted in ancient wisdom, is one long and interesting narrative of something original, much that is full of individuality, and enough that is entirely fresh and additional.

CHAPTER IX

SADHANA—FACE TO FACE WITH GOD

WE are usually moulded by the compelling influence of early environment; so much so, that great effort is required to counter that influence. The way of life and the mode of thought adopted early in life mostly determines the later part of it. Aurobindo however, defied both environment and education, and achieved something on his own, frustrating his father's plans. Almost at the end of his educational career, something incalculable happened to him. His inner urge went counter to the western and highly modern and materialistic education which had been given him from his fifth year. It transformed him from a brilliant, highly intellectual, and prosperous worldly gentleman into a blazing spiritual and contemplative Sadhak who, after a hard inner struggle, triumphantly achieved and enjoyed an infinite calm, and gave to the world a new philosophy. It is not easy to conceive how Sri Aurobindo who was, almost a stranger to India and to Indian culture up to the age of twenty-one, should have eventually taken to the Indian way of spiritual discipline. It would not have been so strange if he had become a Christian or if he had adopted the Brahmo form of worship. But he followed, for a great length of time, almost the orthodox type of Sadhana. Before dealing with his Sadhana however, it will be interesting to note how he came to take to the path of spirituality at all.

It has already been mentioned that from his thirteenth year he had had a strong urge to fight selfishness and to sacrifice for others. It has also been noted that he was a contemplative and had mystic traits in him. The first signs, however, of intense feeling and aspiration are to be found in his poetic endeavours. His early poems embody the outpourings of a potentially rich and majestic heart. His expression

of patriotism and devotion to the motherland reveals his deeply emotional and religious nature. He required some time for the study of Indian lore. Soon enough, after coming to India, the influence of the Indian environment gave shape to his spiritual instinct. "We must free India", "We must sacrifice everything for her sake", were categorical imperatives with him for a long time. His efforts to build his personality were for India; his attempt to acquire more moral and mental power was for her sake and in the beginning it was for her that he practised Yoga. To him India had already become "a spiritual being" and he fought for her freedom, not only to secure political and economic benefit but also for her complete spiritual regeneration, so that her full message could be delivered to the world. His study of the lives and teachings of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda seems to have been responsible for decisive action in this matter. Thus, parallel with the dominant note of patriotism and sacrifice for Mother India, there developed within him an intense love for spirituality and spiritual truth for which India stood. Gradually he came to believe that there was great substance in the way pointed out by the Gita and the Upanishads and that the pursuit of it would lead him to the spiritual experience which would ultimately enthrone his soul on the firmest and the truest of foundations.

Long before he was actually called upon to practise regular Sadhana, Aurobindo had some spiritual experiences. This shows that he was never a stranger to the realm which he was later to enter and where, by his inborn tendencies and herculean efforts, he was to establish an empire. It is recorded that when he returned to India in February 1893 and landed at Apollo Bunder, Bombay, he felt as if a vast calm descended upon him—a calm which was to surround and remain with him for some months afterwards.

One cannot say whether his Bombay experience was the

very first of his spiritual experience, but it is certainly one that is known to the world. Similar early experiences in their respective careers have been recorded in the case of many Sadhaks and Siddhas. Their usefulness is undoubted and their value to the person concerned inestimable. Such an experience, even a single and detached one, is always cherished and remembered as a pointer. It reassures an aspirant and helps to create self-confidence. It is a clear indication of present possibilities and it denotes a future promise. But it is of course necessary that such an experience should have occurred in the waking state and should be vivid, intense, and sufficiently deep. It should not be vague, confused, dreamy, or hallucinatory.

It might not be out of place to mention here Aurobindo's curiosity about auto-writing by the planchette. While in Baroda, in 1901, Dr. Krishnadhan, had once been invoked. A question about Tilak was asked and a reply came that he would fight to the end, and would keep his head high when others would bend! To a further question about his own future activities, the reply was "build the temple". It should be noted that Aurobindo was at that time thinking of the "Bhavani Mandir".

It is interesting to note that experiences similar to those which Aurobindo had immediately on landing in India, have been recorded in connection with some great souls, early in their lives. One should be careful however, to avoid comparisons because times as well as circumstances differ in each case. Gautama, the Buddha, when very young and while wandering about in the gardens of his father, sometimes experienced a kind of causeless unearthly happiness whenever he sat under a certain Amalaki tree. Later, after practising severe and nerve-testing austerities, when Gautama approached Alarkalam, the Yogi, for advice, he recalled that happy experience and asked the Yogi if it could be restored

to him. Gadadhar, (Ramakrishna Paramahansa), when wandering in a field while aged only eight or so, went into a deep trance. It occurred as he saw a line of beautiful white cranes was wending its way against the background of dark-blue clouds in the sky. He remembered the experience for a long time and could recall it vividly. On another occasion he went into a trance as he danced while playing the role of Shiva. As a young student, Narendra, the well-known Vivekananda, almost every day had the vision of a bright flame, which he seemed to enter as he closed his eyes and went to sleep. Kavi Rabindra, the Poet of Asia, about the age of seventeen, suddenly saw one day the whole world bathed in a charming light. The vision haunted him for a long time. Numerous instances such as these can be quoted from the lives of mystics, both eastern and western, ancient and modern. It is sufficient here, however, to say that such experiences play a very useful role in the spiritual life of aspirants.

Other experiences of a spiritual nature are recorded in the case of Aurobindo. Once while walking on the ridge of the Shankaracharya Hill (also called Takht-e-Suleman) in Srinagar, Kashmir, he had a glimpse of the Vacant Infinite enveloping and absorbing everything else. It was as it were, the vivid experience of the illimitable Void (Akāsha) to the exclusion of everything else. This experience has been very eloquently described by him in his sonnet "Advaita" appearing in "Last Poems". He says:—

“.....Around me was a formless solitude:

All had become one strange Unnamable,

.....Topless and fathomless, forever still.”

On another occasion, when visiting Brahmanand at Chandod, he went to the shrine of Kali on the banks of the Narmada. There he felt he saw the Mother Kali, “a living presence, deathless and divine”, which gave him faith in image worship.

There was another occasion in the early years of his stay in Baroda. He was faced with a situation when his carriage and four were about to be wrecked in an accident. It was a critical moment and suddenly he experienced the vision of the Godhead surging up from within ("in me, enveloping me the body of Him") and saving the situation.

These experiences show clearly that Aurobindo's mind was amenable to them. It should be noted however, that these have nothing to do with occultism or with hallucinatory phenomena. The latter happen in the course and context of certain other circumstances which are almost pathological. Occultism concerns itself with phenomena far lower than those on the spiritual place. Aurobindo's experiences came without any effort on his part and in such an unexpected manner that they were always a surprise to him. Moreover, they came long before he began to take any regular spiritual exercise. It is strange, but true that Aurobindo did not attach much importance to them at that time, nor was he immediately drawn to Sadhana. He was then, burning with an intense desire to serve his country and was busy with deep studies. He was, however, yearning all the time for greater power with which to liberate India. That power was Brahma-tej which he ultimately acquired.

Aurobindo's ultimate turn towards spirituality and Yoga can be traced to his growing conviction that that was the real path to Brahmatej and to perfection. He saw no good in a slavish imitation by India of the way of the West, and the famous couplet of the Gita regarding following one's own Swadharma, one's own inner law of being, rather than that of others, deeply impressed him. That was the secret of his adopting the Indian way of life. His studies confirmed his growing conviction that there was something deeper, nobler, subtler, more powerful and vital in Sanātana Dharma than was seen and appreciated by the English-edu-

cated. So the decision was made and he gradually turned to Yoga, the most generic term used for that system of spiritual culture and discipline which ultimately leads to the shattering of the shell of the individual ego, to self-transcendence in the supermost degree and to the ultimate realization of the immanent Spirit and unitive life in it.

In the beginning, this decision took shape as a two-fold movement in his life: one was a powerful urge to free India from foreign domination and to rehabilitate her spiritually and culturally; the second was his intense personal aspiration to reach the highest goal in spirituality. As he proceeded, the former urge led him, for however brief a period, to the special and marvellous role he played in politics and the latter ultimately took him to Pondicherry and to the supramental regions. In both cases, however, the dominant note at all times was spirituality. Not only did he carry on Sadhana while he was busy with politics, but his whole political career can be characterized as a part of his intense spiritual Sadhana, especially the Karmayoga phase of it. Outwardly, he was intensely busy with politics from 1906 to 1910, but inwardly he was poised and he operated as an instrument of the Divine. Everything that he did and spoke and wrote was on a high spiritual level. This is obvious from the way he conducted his politics and his journals and from his example of dedication to the Mother which he placed before the younger generation. His whole political career, especially the year spent in Alipore jail, helped him to attain his spiritual goal.

Aurobindo brought to his Sadhana some exceptionally high and rare qualifications, seldom seen together in a single personality. His sincerity was absolute and he lived a life of effortless simplicity. He was shy by nature and shunned all limelight and publicity. His reserve saved him from the meaningless social rounds. He had the gift of detach-

ment which was almost natural to him. He was highly intelligent. His power of concentration was tremendous. The Mundakopanishad gives the analogy of the arrow which gets fixed in the target like the mind of the contemplative in the object of devotion. His intellectual capacity also was prodigious. He was a voracious reader and could discuss any subject. His literary gift was extraordinary, as is proved by his voluminous writings as well as the very high quality of most of them. He was rich in emotion and in imagination, which gave added strength and a rare poetical quality to his literary production. Above all, he was self-confident and knew that he had a mission in life. His spiritual experiences added to his self-confidence and confirmed him in his inclination to follow the chosen path.

There is not much autobiographical material available covering this phase of Aurobindo's life, yet to the general reader and to Sadhaks of all ages and climes this was a very important and practical part of it. Although heights that he reached are there for all to see and admire, they will be the despair of most, if we are unable to discover how they were reached and by what effort. It is another matter, that very few would have the daring and the capacity to attempt the path when fully known. But even if only the process is known, there can be a certain intellectual satisfaction. Moreover, Sadhaks could take hints if they knew and understood the process in detail.

From stray hints dropped casually here and there by Aurobindo as well as from other sources, one can have a fair idea of the general direction of his Sadhana, the different stages through which he passed, the modifications he adopted from time to time, the high-water-mark he reached, the special features of his system and finally the extremely trying as well as sometimes intensely agonising phases that he went through. Aurobindo warns against complacency, all those

who are under the impression that Sadhana is a smooth-sailing affair. It is an adventure of the highest order and an experiment with one's whole soul. Especially was it so in his case, as he broke quite new ground and launched himself on uncharted seas and trod through pathless woods without the aid of a Guru as such. Normally, when one follows a spiritual path one has to bid good-bye to all physical comforts and to go through mental and moral conflicts which can only be described by the word, "excruciating". And yet the path has its own charms and attraction. The final prize of an abiding peace and a harmonious and integrated personality is inviting beyond measure.

Before proceeding with Aurobindo's Sadhana, it would perhaps be helpful to quote a passage from the published booklet, "Sri Aurobindo and his Ashram". On page 46, a quotation appears from one of his letters which purports to say something of his practice of Yoga. It says: "I began my Yoga in 1904 without a Gurù; in 1908 I received important help from a Maharatha yogi and discovered the foundations of my Sadhana; but from that time till the Mother (Mira Richard) came to India, I received no spiritual help from anyone else. My Sadhana before and afterwards was not founded upon books but upon personal experiences that crowded on me from within. But in the jail, I had the Gita and the Upanishads with me. I practised the yoga of the Gita and meditated with the help of the Upanishads. These were the only books from which I found guidance; the Veda which I first began to read long afterwards in Pondicherry rather confirmed what experiences I already had, than was any guide to my Sadhana. I sometimes turned to the Gita for light when there was a question or a difficulty and usually received help or an answer from it. It is a fact that I was hearing constantly the voice of Vivekananda speaking to me for a fortnight in the jail in my solitary

meditation and I felt his presence. The voice spoke only on a special and limited but very important field of spiritual experience and it ceased as soon as it had finished saying all that it had to say on that subject."

This is but a glimpse into his practice. But it serves as a good introduction since it is from his own pen. As already indicated, once the decision was made, Aurobindo plunged into Sadhana with a single-mindedness and intensity of purpose which were characteristic of him in everything that he said and did. Normally speaking, a Guru is always indicated in the matter of spiritual Sadhana. He usually initiates and guides the disciple from stage to stage. It is said that, especially in the matter of Yoga, one should not venture into the path without a Guru, as a novice is likely to commit mistakes which may lead to permanent injury to body and mind. There are a number of instances where unguided as well as misguided enthusiasts have lost their way and floundered. We find, therefore, that in most cases, Yogis have Gurus. Moreover, the Guru is traditionally given a very high place, as he transmits by personal effort and contact what books and intellectual study cannot impart. Some schools of thought assert that the Guru is superior to the father himself, as he gives spiritual birth to the disciple, and some others, that he is himself Brahman, since it is he who is instrumental in leading the disciple to the Godhead. In most of the Upanishads, the transmission of Brahmanvidya to the disciples is by a Guru after a long stay with him and after repeated questioning. The Taittiriya Upanishad exhorts the student to look upon the Acharya (the preceptor) as God. All this goes to prove the extreme importance of a Guru.

It is not, however, always the disciple who seeks the Guru. There are instances where the Guru has come to the disciple who was waiting for him. A real Siddha or Guru

is always anxious to find a good disciple, to transmit his Vidya to him which otherwise would be lost. Ramakrishna is said to have complained that no good Shishyas (disciples) were available. In the case of Aurobindo, it was not that he was averse to a Guru. As is evident, he did take some guidance from people who were capable of helping him. But we can say that he had no Guru in the usual sense of the term. The following from Anilbaran Roy's journal (1926) in connection with Aurobindo's Sadhana is revealing: "Sri Aurobindo: 'Though generally a touch from the Guru is necessary, it is not indispensable. In my case there was no touch from a Guru—I got an inner touch and practised Yoga. At a certain stage, when I could not proceed any further, Lele gave me some help. When I came to Pondicherry I got from within a programme for my Sadhana. I carried it out for myself, but could not make much progress regarding the help to be given to others; then came Mira—I found with her aid the method of this help.'" When the urge first came, Aurobindo took some preliminary instruction in Pranayam from one Deodhar, an engineer in Baroda, who was a disciple of Brahmananda of Chandod. That instruction sufficed and he started on his career of regular Yoga Sadhana at the beginning of 1904. At that time, there was a notion among people that Pranayam was indispensable for Yoga, which is really not the case. There can be Yoga without Pranayam, though it is true that the latter is of great help if one can devote some time to it.

It is instructive to see what Aurobindo has to say about Pranayam. "It is my experience", he says, "that Pranayam makes one's intellect sharper and one's brain quicker. When I was doing it in Baroda, I was practising it for about five to six hours per day, three hours in the morning and two or three hours in the evening. I felt that there was a great accession of light and power in the mind. I

used to write poetry in those days. Earlier, I could sometimes write only about 200 lines a month. After I began practising Pranayam I could write 200 lines in half an hour. My memory was rather dull before. But afterwards, I composed whenever I had inspiration and remembered *ad seriatum* the whole, till I committed it to paper at leisure. I felt as if my brain was encircled by a ring of electricity", (p. 235, "Dakshina" Feb. 1951). In another place, in connection with Pranayam and spiritual results, he says ".... struggled for five years without any the least spiritual result but poetry came like a river and prose like a flood and other things too that were mental, vital, psychical, not spiritual richness or openings...." After some years he dropped Pranayam but that did not mean the end of his Yoga or Sadhana. But, for any Yoga or Sadhana, it is necessary to have concentration, continuity and steadiness of faith and purpose, and contemplation (Dhyan).

We should distinguish between spiritual Sadhana, Pranayam and other practices which may be included in Sadhana. The form of the earlier Sadhana of Aurobindo has to be only inferred; it probably comprised intense thinking, heart-searching, and contemplation. It was for further intensification of this Sadhana and expediting the consummation that Aurobindo took to Yoga, the Ashtānga Yoga which includes Pranayam and seven other steps.

In the course of his writings, Aurobindo once remarked that "all life is Yoga". In his case, it was literally so. From the very beginning of his awareness of a higher spiritual life and the consciousness of his great mission, he led the life of a practising Yogi without any leisure or lapse or slackening.

In fact, the whole of involution and evolution in the universe is one continuous Yoga of the Supreme Spirit. It is in this sense that Shri Krishna as "Yogeshwar" (the

master of Yoga) designates the power of creation of the Lord as "Yoga-māyā". The individual is carried along this eternal stream of Yoga unconsciously till he becomes aware of it. As soon as he is aware of it and of the extent of his part in it, he is called upon to play his role consciously and expedite matters. He then partakes consciously in the creative Yoga, and the joy of co-operation and of being in tune with the Infinite is his. This Yoga is not an individual affair, though the part one plays might for a time be considered to be very intimate and important by the person concerned. Aurobindo's Sadhana gradually began to help him in his spiritual progress. It progressively developed into Yoga for humanity and ultimately identified itself with universal Yoga. It became a conscious participation in the mighty upward evolution and ascent towards the Divine. His special endeavour, however, was for Divine descent into mind, life, and matter in order to raise them all to divine heights.

It is obvious then that in the history of Aurobindo's Sadhana, Yoga has a special place and significance. It evolved with the unique spiritual progress which he envisaged and stressed. It also assumed new importance. It gathered fresher and deeper connotation and finally it came to be what is described as Integral Yoga. The evolution of the meaning of the word Yoga in Aurobindo's life was similar to the expanding and deepening significance of the word Ahimsa in Gandhiji's life or that of the important word "Yajna" in the Gita. But before that matter is discussed, it is necessary to understand briefly the meaning of Yoga according to common interpretation and also according to Patanjali, the author of Yoga Sutras.

The word "Yoga" is from the Sanskrit root "Yuj", to join, to become one with, to be united. "Yoga" is the act of joining, act of becoming one, the act of being united.

It also means the method or technique that leads to the union of the soul with the Oversoul or the Universal Self. It is also interpreted as concentration, communion. Probably "communion" in the sense of spiritual intercourse, more adequately conveys the meaning of Yoga than any other word. This English word "communion" has to a great extent a connotation which is invariably attached to Yoga.

Some scholars are of the opinion that Yoga, together with the cult of Siva, was a characteristic of the religious life of the pre-Aryan inhabitants of Mohenjo-daro and Harappa, i.e., of Sind and Southern Punjab. They say that Yoga as a religio-mystic ideology and practice can be traced to the Agamic source but usually not to the Nigamas (the Vedas). That is why, they observe there is no caste or sex restriction in teaching Yoga. But, since the script of those days is yet undeciphered, the main source of inference is from the fact that Yoga is always associated in all later literature with Pashu-pati or Yogiraj Siva. This is reinforced by the Sind find of the image of Siva in a Yogic posture, surrounded by animals (Pashu). It is equally true, that the Rigveda is full of references to Yoga. Brahmashri Daiwarta Sharma of Gokarn in his "Yoga-Sudha" (in manuscript) has derived the Yoga system on the basis of Rigveda alone. Among the Upanishads, it is Katha that refers to it as "Yoga-vidhi" when Yama teaches the secret to Nachiketa. The Gita distinguishes clearly Rajayoga, Karmayoga, Bhaktiyoga and Jnanyoga. Whatever the origin, however, the fact seems to be clear that Yoga as a technique, as a method, as a means of concentration and control of the mind and consciousness, of obtaining occult powers and of attaining the highest spiritual perfection is traceable to the remotest past of India.

From the earliest times Yoga is always spoken of as a method of attaining a spiritual goal and not so much as a

philosophy or metaphysics. In later literature Yoga is so often mentioned. The Yoga Upanishads, the Gita in the "Mahabharata", and the "Yoga-Vasishtha" deal with this subject at some length, but the "Patanjala Yoga Sutras" are recognized as the most authoritative treatise. One of the important features of Patanjali's treatise is that it sets out the full technique of the conquest of self, without reference to or insistence on any theistic, philosophical or metaphysical theories. His method is based on the study of the nature of the human mind and consciousness. He shows the path of full control by stilling the mind's modifications. Yoga is both a science and an art. It is a science in so far as it probes into the nature of the human apparatus of thinking, feeling, willing and other activities of the consciousness. It is an art because it teaches practical methods of controlling the mind fully, by detaching it from the self and the ego, and by promoting communion with the Self which is Satchidanand. An immense amount of literature probably existed earlier, but the masterly and wonderful summation and synthesis of the whole subject in the form of Sutras by Patanjali, dating back to about the second century B.C., has cast all other literature into oblivion. Zimmer, in writing about the Yoga Sutras, characterises them as the most astounding works of philosophical prose (he refers also to the Bhāshya) in the literature of the world. He says further that they are remarkable for their "wonderful sobriety, clarity, succinctness and elasticity of expression (p. 282, "Philosophies of India").

Yoga is based on a simple theory about the Inner Self. That Self is detached and independent of the self of the individual, his consciousness and its modifications. The egoistic self is the result of its attachment to the body and the individual existence. The Self however, is self-luminous and is attained by intuitive knowledge of the inner working of the human consciousness. To find out the Inner Self, the Puru-

sha, which is beyond the dualities and which is of the nature of self-existent bliss, and to be identified with that Self is the aim of Patanjala Yoga. This Yoga is probably indebted to Samkhya philosophy, for the theory of the Non-active and yet eternally Self-aware Purusha. All activity is due to Prakriti or Nature. The Purusha or Self is the silent witness, likened often to a mirror which reflects all that goes on in front of it, but is neither affected nor activated by it. Digging deeper and deeper into human consciousness, Yoga has found that neither the objects, nor the senses that perceive them, nor the nerves that carry the sensations to the mind, nor the mind itself is the cogniser or knower. The knower is separate from all these, as is evident from the fact that though all these are working, the knower or the inner person might not know anything unless he is attentive. So the knower's existence and his awareness are the prime factors in all knowledge. All the perception, conception, cognition, etc., take place in the Chitta or the mind-stuff. The Chitta is by nature extrovert, though it has also the capacity to look inward. It conveys impressions from outside inwards and also conveys the orders of the self to the senses. In course of time, the self builds itself into a formidable entity and becomes attached to the numerous objects of the senses. Yoga attempts to rid the Chitta of various modifications in its stuff and free the self in order that it may identify itself with the Inner Self rather than with senses or outside objects. It is an attempt to move the Chitta higher in the direction of evolution and away from involution. A normal person's consciousness or Chitta is involved in so many things. It is not, however the involution that is the cause of sorrow and misery and of the sense of frustration and defeat and humiliation; it is the attachment of the self to sense objects which is responsible for all that. The evolutionary urge emphasises that a person should be free from this attach-

ment and the consequent instability of the mind, and that he should enjoy the inner calm characteristic of the Purusha, which is the birthright of the self. Yoga avers that when the Chitta is stilled and is rid of the modifications, the self identifies itself with the Inner Self and rests with it in the original state of bliss.

Yama, Niyama, Asana, Prānāyāma, Pratyāhāra, Dhyāna, Dhāranā, and Samādhi are the eight steps of the eightfold or Ashtānga Yoga. These can be divided into four groups of two each in the order in which they have been mentioned, so that one may understand them better.

Yama, which means self-control, consists of Ahimsa (non-injury in thought, word, and deed), satya (truthfulness in everything), Asteya (non-stealing includes non-storing), Brahmacharya (continence in thought, word and action), and Aparigraha (non-acceptance of gifts and offerings). These should be observed by all aspirants irrespective of time, place and circumstance. They have the weight, dignity, and effect of the great Vratas or ethical observances. Similarly, Niyama, which means rules or regulations, is five-fold, as follows: Shoucha is internal and external cleanliness and purification, Santosha is contentment, Tapa is austerity, Swādhyāya is the study of the properly chosen subjects, and the fifth is Ishwara-pranidhāna, dedication or surrender of everything to God.

Yama and Niyama, the first dyad in this system, is important in a special sense. Obviously it is purificatory but it is basic. If one's body, senses and the mind, which are the main instruments of this Sadhana, are not pure, the danger is that later, at any time and at any stage, there might be a fall in store for the aspirant. As an aspirant advances, he feels the influx of mental, emotional and spiritual powers and if he has not gone through the process of intense purification, he is likely to be exposed to tempta-

tions which would lead him astray. Then, instead of developing into a real Yogi or a Yoga-āroodha, he becomes a Yoga-bhrashta, or one fallen from Yoga.

The next dyad is Asana and Pranayama. Asana is a bodily posture in which one is required to be steady. It should be easy to adopt and the spine has to be erect and straight. After practice, one should be able to hold on for hours. It is Padmāsana that is often recommended. It should not tire the aspirant but at the same time it should not induce drowsiness or sleep. Pranayama comes next, the control of breath, which leads to the control of the vital powers. Through this process it is sought to still the mind. The control of Prāṇa leads to control of the mind, and it is equally true, so say the Yoga books, that control of the mind leads to control of the vital powers in the body. Here, however, Pranayam means and includes control and regulation of the inhalation and exhalation process, as well as holding the breath in, and out at will. Together with these physical practices, contemplation is recommended. In the beginning, contemplation should be limited to the process of concentrating one's mind on the breathing action itself. These practices gradually qualify a person for further and greater concentration and contemplation.

Pratyahara and Dharana follow. Pratyahara is withdrawal of the senses from sense-objects. Simple self-observation will show that our senses continuously run after sense-objects. It is this running after objects which prevents the mind from self-contemplation. The Gita says that the mind is, as it were, tossed by the stormy waves of the desires. Pratyahara is a process of discipline. It prevents the senses from running hither and thither like a wayward child. It is to a certain extent a negative process but it includes leading the senses inwards into the Chitta. The Sutra give Dharana the next place of importance. And Dharana is

definitely a positive step. It makes one capable of holding the mind and fixing it on the cherished goal. These two together with Dhyana (contemplation) are probably meant when Zimmer designates the process as "introvert-concentration" (p. 283, "Philosophies of India"). The last two steps lead naturally to consummation. Dhyana is the fixation and continuous holding of the mind in contemplation. It is unbroken concentration of the mind on the object. The next step has neither a particular form nor requires an object for contemplation. The Chitta is concentrated on the Self. That is Samadhi. To attain prolonged Samadhi is the ambition of all aspirants in this line.

This in essence is the general technique of the Ashtanga Yoga of Patanjali. Through the course of ages, a huge superstructure has been built on it and we have now Hatha Yoga, Raja Yoga, Karma Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, and Jnana Yoga. There are others which are current but less prominently mentioned, namely Mantra Yoga, Laya Yoga, Trimarga Yoga, Adhyatma Yoga, and Kundalini Yoga. There are certain basic things common to all these Yogas. The ultimate aim in all is the same and that is, to experience continued unadulterated bliss of identity and unitive life with the Supreme Spirit. Among the means, the most important, namely, concentration and communion, are to be found in all Yogas. Yama and Niyama are also compulsory in each Yoga. All are open to all to follow, irrespective of religion, race, sex, or age. But there is a difference in each Yoga, because the respective systems lay stress on using predominantly one or the other of the human powers. For instance, the Sadhak who mainly uses the body and the vital powers as instruments is called a Hathayogi, while one who uses predominantly his emotive power is called a Bhaktiyogi, and so on. But every Sadhak, whether he relies on his vital powers, his mind, his powers of will and action, his

emotions, his intellect or power of discrimination, has to see to it that he purifies his powers, controls them, conserves them, concentrates them and ultimately dedicates them to the Supreme Spirit. This technique is common to all Yogas and was founded originally on the principles of the Patanjala Yoga Sutras.

Aurobindo's Yoga, though it began as a simple Raja Yoga, later developed into Integral Yoga after vast experiences in each Yoga and his masterly synthesis of all. To revert to his Sadhana, let us see how he proceeded after beginning the Pranayam practices in 1904.

Two more years of comparatively peaceful life in Baroda lay between him and his eventual plunge into the whirlpool of the great national upsurge called the Swadeshi movement. It will be more convenient to treat separately these two years and the further block of four which were spent in active politics. Aurobindo refers often to the Gita and the Upanishads but seldom to the Yoga Sutras. This might well be because he was not in need of day-to-day guidance so much as in the matter of the main direction and as regards crucial points. During this period, his Pranayam practices became prolonged and more and more intense. His Sadhana was strongly influencing him, and a distinct stamp of spirituality was appearing on all that he thought and did. He was immersed in the work of the revival of the glory of India and the revitalisation of her life. But in his mind the conviction grew that all re-orientation in this land should be based on spiritual awakening. To him this awakening did not mean only admiration for the past or an inclination to other-worldliness or a passive approach to problems. He visualised the vigorous awakening of the "Vedanta Kesari" the lion of Vedanta, and the shaking of its manes after the slothful slumber of centuries. He thought of the spiritualization of every worthwhile activity of the whole nation. Every day of

his Sadhana during this period, while it took him by strides towards the liberation of his soul from the shackles of the senses and worldly ambitions, illumined also his vision of a new India rising on the horizon, her soul afire with spiritual aspiration.

We have already observed that even in his politics and throughout his political career the spiritual note was predominant. It may be questioned whether he would have entered politics at all, if it had not afforded him an opportunity to rouse the spiritual consciousness of the people. The spiritual strain, and sometimes even a religious strain, in the nationalism he preached was so obvious and frank that some of his opponents ironically remarked that he should abandon politics and take to religion! He saw that God was behind the awakening in India and told the people so in the clearest terms.

Usually Yoga, philosophy, metaphysics, and other such subjects are associated with Sannyas, with retreat from life or with escapism. Aurobindo hated every kind of escapism and cowardly evasion of life which is inherently and ought to be full of vigour and adventure. At the same time, an intense inwardness developed in his outlook on life and on problems that faced the country. As early as 1893-1894, he had written regarding national regeneration that, "our actual enemy is not any force exterior to ourselves, but our own crying weaknesses, our cowardice, our purblind sentimentalism". He said that our "appeal, the appeal of every high-souled and self-respecting nation, ought not to lie to the opinion of the Anglo-Indians, no, nor yet to the British sense of justice but to our own reviving sense of manhood, to our own sincere fellow-feeling...with the silent and suffering people of India". He increasingly believed that India's salvation could only come through faith and spiritual discipline. But his was not mere blind faith in past glories

nor did he wish only to repeat the past. He felt that a great past ought to be followed by a greater future and the evolution of spiritual consciousness in India should be able to write new chapters in the history of man.

What exact progress he made in Yogic practices during the next two years of his stay in Baroda, from 1904-06, it is difficult to say. But judging from the fact that by 1908, he required the help of an adept to guide him, his was not a lingering and lazy Sadhana. In the matter of his advance in spirituality and the firm establishment of a spiritual foundation in his mind, we have ample evidence in a most intimate and ennobling letter to his wife Mrinalini on 30th of August 1905. It marks a definite stage in the perilous journey he had undertaken. Since it is a most revealing picture of the working of his mind at that time, it deserves to be quoted in full: (The original is in Bengali):

“My dearest Mrinālini,

“I have received your letter of the 24th August. I was very sorry to read that your parents are again suffering from bereavement. But you have not mentioned which of their children has passed away. But what use is our grief and our sorrow? Our quest for happiness in this world reveals to us sorrow in the very midst of happiness and sorrow enveloping it all over. This holds good not merely in the case of our attachment to our children but it is applicable to all our desires for worldly things. The only remedy is to be firm and calm in one’s mind and to surrender all joy and sorrow at the feet of Bhagawan”.

(Then follow lines regarding money matters, which have been omitted as being of no consequence.)

“Now I revert to that matter (probably he had already written to her on this subject). Possibly by this time you have realised that the person with whom your lot is cast is a very peculiar gentleman. Somehow my thoughts and

feelings, my ideals, my field of action are not like those of other people in this country. Everything with me is different and rather uncommon. You know how people regard uncommon opinion, extraordinary attempts, and high aspirations. They call all that madness. But when the madman succeeds, he is no longer called a madman but is looked upon as genius. But how many of such people succeed? It is only ten among thousands that are usually uncommon and it is only one among the ten that is successful. It is yet a far cry for me to talk of success. I have not yet fully entered the lists. I must at present be looked upon as madman. It is of course, very inauspicious for a woman to be in the hands of a madman because usually a woman's mind is occupied with worldly joys and sorrows. A madman has only sorrow to give to his wife, why then talk of any joy?

“The founders of the Hindu religion knew all this very well. They looked upon extraordinary life, great endeavour, and high aspiration with respect. Whether it was a madman or a great man, they had regard for uncommon qualities. But all this leads to great hardship to women who have married such people. What then is the remedy? The Rishis found out a good remedy. They said to women, “instead of looking to anybody else, you should regard the husband as your greatest Guru”. The wife is the equal partner of the husband in his Dharma. It follows that she should help and cooperate in the Dharma which her husband has chosen. She should give him advice, encourage him in his pursuits, look upon him as her cherished idol and share with him his joys and sorrows. It is the man's right to choose the vocation he wants to follow and it is the woman's duty to help and encourage him.

“Now the question before you is whether you would follow the dictates of the Hindu Dharma or act according to the new ways of modern civilization. On account of

marriage, your lot is cast with a madman. Perhaps it is the result of some sin you might have committed in your past life! It is advisable for you to strike a compromise with your fate. Now, what would be the form of that compromise? Would you listen to the common run of people and forsake me on the plea that I am a madman? After all, the madman will go his destined way. It is not possible for you to control him and keep him under your influence. He has a stronger character than yours. What then will you do? Simply weep and shed tears in a corner? Or will you get along with the madman and be his companion (pagaler sange pagli) and help him on? You know the story of the queen (Gandhāri) who blindfolded her eyes in order to suffer blindness along with her king consort (Dhritarāshtra). Even if you have learnt your lessons in Brahmo schools, after all you belong to a Hindu family and the blood of Hindu ancients courses in your veins. I have no doubts about your following the path of a devoted Hindu wife.

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“I am a victim of three insanities, if I can call them so. My first insanity consists in my firm belief that the qualifications, genius, higher education, learning, and wealth that Bhagawān has given me, all belong to Him. We have a right to spend only as much as is required for the upkeep of the family and is absolutely needed. What remains ought to be rendered back to Bhagwān. If I spend all that I have for myself, for my pleasures, for luxury, then I am a veritable thief. The Hindu Shastras say that he who does not give back to the Lord what he receives from Him, is a thief. So far, I have given only one-eighth to the Lord and spent seven-eighths on my pleasures. I have been engrossed in worldly happiness. Half of my life has been already wasted. After all, even a beast maintains itself and its family!

“I have now fully realised that so far, I have lived merely an animal life and have indulged in moral theft. I am full of remorse and am disgusted with myself. Now I must say, thus far and no further. I have now ceased sinning in that manner for life. But, what after all is the meaning of giving to the Lord? Of course, it means spending for purposes which are good and of a religious and spiritual nature. I have no regrets for whatever I have paid to Sarojini (sister) or Usha. To give to others is a part of religion. To help those who have run to us for succour is much more so. But one cannot be said to have discharged one's duty if he pays only to brothers and sisters. In these hard days, practically the whole of the country is at my doors for help. There are thirty crores of my brethren in the country and many of them are starving. The majority is ground down by hardship and misery. They may be said to be just living. The burden of helping them also is on us.

“What have you to say? Will you be my co-sharer in this meritorious work? I wish to live like a common man, eat like him and clothe myself like him and spend on the self the minimum that is necessary. Whatever I can spare, I would like to spend for the Lord. If you too think alike and are willing to sacrifice, I can certainly fulfil my desire. You were saying that you were not ‘advanced’. Here I am making you an offer and showing the way to real advancement. Will you follow this path?

“The second madness that has recently taken hold of me is the determination, happen what may, to see God face to face, whatever the means. Now-a-days, it is fashionable in the name of religion to take the name of God almost at every step, to pray in public and show people how religious one is. I do not want to go after that kind of religion. If God exists, then there must be some way which would lead one to experience his existence, to see him face to face. I

have determined to tread the path that leads to God, however difficult it might be. The Hindu Dharma declares that that path lies in one's own body, in one's own mind. It has also laid down the rules which ought to be observed. I have started observing all those rules. Within a month, I have been able to testify to the truth of what Hindu Dharma has laid down. I am seeing and experiencing all the signs that it has indicated. I now desire that I should take you also along with me. You may not be able to follow me so far and so exactly, since you seem to lack the necessary knowledge. But there is no harm in following step by step. Siddhi or fulfilment is bound to come to everyone who follows the path. It entirely depends upon the person, however, to choose to take to that path. Nobody can take you there by force. If you agree to take to it, I shall write to you again in connection with this matter.

“My third madness is with regard to Mother India. Other people look upon their country as some material thing, consisting of vast plains, fields, forests, mountains and rivers. I look upon India as my Mother, I am devoted to her, I worship her. If somebody mounts on the chest of his mother and begins to drink her blood, what does her son do? Does he sit down for meals, and, settle down with a calm and a quiet mind to enjoy life with his wife and children? Or does he run to the succour of his suffering mother? I am confident that I have the strength in me to bring salvation to these our fallen people. It is not of physical strength that I am speaking. I am not going to wage this battle with the help of swords and rifles. The strength I speak of is the strength of knowledge. There is not only Kshatratej, the strength of warriors, in this world. There exists also Brahmatej, the strength of Brahminhood which is founded on knowledge. This is not a new idea, nor does it belong to modern days. I am born with it. This

idea is running through every vein of mine. Bhagawan has sent me down to this earth for fulfilling this great mission. This great idea began to sprout in my mind when I was hardly fourteen. It took firm root and was securely founded when I was eighteen. Having heard what the maternal uncle said, you thought that he was the villain who was dragging your good husband to a bad path. But it is your seemingly good husband who was dragging him as well as hundreds into this path, call it good or bad. He will continue the process and drag thousands more. I do not know and cannot say whether fulfilment would come in my own lifetime, but I am sure it is bound to come.

“Now I ask you, what do you wish to do in this matter? The wife is the Shakti, the power of the husband. Do you want to be the disciple of Usha and tell beads in the name of the Sahib, and worship the foreign master? Do you wish to lessen the power of your husband by being indifferent? Would you not double his powers by sympathy and zeal? You may be inclined to say, ‘What can a common girl like me to do in such an important matter like this? I have neither the strength of mind nor the intellectual capacity required for this great work. I am afraid even to think of such matters.’ I propose to you a simple remedy. Seek the feet of God and surrender yourself. Take to the path which leads to God. Then all the things that you lack would be given to you without delay. He who seeks the protection of God is freed from all fear in course of time. And if you cease listening to all and sundry and confide in me, I can lend you my strength. That would not in any way lessen my strength. On the other hand, it would increase all the more. We all say that the wife is the Shakti, the power of her husband. This means that the husband sees his own reflection and his prototype in his wife. He hears the echo of his own ambition from his wife and thus redoubles his own power.

“What, do you intend living as you do now, for all your life? ‘I shall have fine clothes, I shall eat nice food, I shall laugh and dance and enjoy all pleasures’—this mood of your mind cannot be said to reflect the advance of your soul. In recent days unfortunately, this kind of a narrow and selfish outlook which is rather disgusting, has taken hold of the minds of our womenfolk. Cast all this away and come with me. We are all here in this world to do the work of God. Let us begin it.

“You are too straightforward, and that seems to be a defect in your character. You listen to whatever is said by all kinds of people. This makes your mind unstable. Your power of discrimination has no chance to develop. You have lost the capacity of concentration. You will have to improve this state of things. You will have to listen to one voice only and thus accumulate knowledge. You must fix your mind on a single aim and try to achieve it with devotion. You will have to be steady and firm in your purpose in utter disregard of adverse opinion and criticism.

“There is one more defect but that is not of your character but of the times and circumstances. Bengal is subject to this weakness. People are not willing to give serious attention even to serious things. Religion, philanthropy, high aspirations, great endeavour, salvation of the country and such other high and noble things are made fun of or ridiculed. They make light of such things and pass on. Your education in a Brahmo school has been responsible for something of this defect in you. I found it in Barin (his younger brother) also. All of us suffer from it in a greater or a lesser degree. The people of Deoghar are full of it. One can get rid of this weakness only by the firmness of one’s mind. You are capable of doing it very easily. Once you get yourself used to thinking, your real nature will manifest itself. You are naturally inclined to do good to

others and you have a sacrificing nature. What you lack is a firm mind. Devotion to God would bring you that strength.

“This was the secret matter about which I wanted to speak to you. Without divulging it to anybody else, you should think about all these things with a steady mind. There is nothing in this to be afraid of. There are many things which ought to be considered. In the beginning, you need not do anything except meditating for half an hour on God. You should place before Him your strong aspirations in the form of an intense prayer. This is sure to prepare your mind gradually. You should always pray to Him that you will never stand in the way of your husband’s course of life, his ideal and his attempts to reach God and that instead, you will always help him and serve as his instrument. Will you do this?

Yours.....”

The contents of this letter are extremely valuable. But especially so from the point of view of his Sadhana; we can regard them as the base on which it was founded. The letter sheds much light on the inner working of his mind. It is autobiographical and its authority therefore is unquestionable. It is a very intimate and frank letter written with the utmost sincerity. It was written to his wife whom he held in high esteem and every word has come from the heart; there is no make-believe in any part of it. He wrote it for her only, under a seal of secrecy and with the avowed intention of converting her to his view. He has revealed to her every action and reaction of his inner being and the motive-power behind its working at that particular time. It was written in August 1905, that is, about a year after the beginning of his Yogic practices. He makes reference to his early experiences which confirmed his convictions regarding the truth of Hindu Dharma.

Since his Sadhana is the relevant subject here, let us see what important points relating to it emerge from the letter. The seed of spiritualistic nationalism had been sown in his mind when he was fourteen and while he was in England. In essence, he felt that India was a veritable Mother and that her redemption from bondage as well as her emancipation from the grip of materialism and of mundane western ideals must come through a revival of spirituality and Brahmatej. By the time that he was eighteen and at Cambridge, the seed had struck firm root. This explains why he contrived to fail in the riding test at the final I.C.S. examination. There was a definite prompting in his heart that he was not meant for the service but for something higher and nobler. He felt that his mission came from Heaven and that he had already launched on a long and difficult journey. In 1905, he recapitulated the momentous history of the development of his ideals and the means of attaining them. He ruled out the use of Kshatratej and was equally definite with regard to his use only of Brahmatej. As distinct from Kshatratej, the prowess of warriors, Brahmatej, the prowess of Brahmins, is based on the power of knowledge, of Tapas (the power of austerities and mental energy), of moral character, and of spirituality.

This then was his attitude towards India and the solution of her problems. He was quite clear in his attitude towards the problem of God and his own relations with Him. To him God, the Supreme Reality, existed beyond doubt. He considered that everything he had, came from God as a gift, and to Him it must be returned. He was only a trustee for its proper use.

Since the fact of God's existence was beyond doubt, it was inevitable that Aurobindo should wish to find a path to Him and to possess Him. He was remorseful that much of his life had been wasted. He was determined to see Him

face to face, whatever the difficulties. His determination can be compared only to that of Buddha to apprehend truth, or of Shri Ramakrishna to meet God. He says that after personal spiritual experiences within a month of beginning Yoga practices, he was convinced of the truth of the Hindu religion. He discovered the inner signs which appear to an aspirant when practising Yoga. While exhorting his wife, he partially reveals how a beginner should make a start. He says that the aspirant should submit and surrender to God, through heartfelt prayers. God would then descend, remove all deficiencies and bless the devotee. This is, in fact, the first lesson in Integral Yoga which he later elaborately developed step by step. He emphasised that the door of God was not closed to anyone who wished to enter. Even to the weakest and the most fallen, there was entry. One must but knock and the doors would stand ajar. A heartfelt voluntary dedication at the feet of God, by way of intense prayer, would in time take the aspirant to Him.

Aurobindo wrote this letter from Baroda in August 1905. He continued there his Sadhana for another year. In August 1906, he went to Calcutta for good. All the time he was gradually succeeding in stilling his mind completely, a consummation described by Yoga as the stopping of the modifications of the mind. Success in a remarkable degree came to him by the end of 1907, after he had settled in Calcutta. Let us now consider some questions which arise out of these facts.

Yoga and its practice is usually associated with a regular and peaceful life which affords enough leisure to observe all its meticulous rules and regulations. An exciting political life in troublous times in the very hub of activity cannot be said to be very propitious or congenial to Yoga. But here we must pause to consider the mind of Aurobindo in order to see how he was able to continue his intense

Sadhana in the midst of a stormy life and an eventful career. Though he had not yet formulated his theory of Integral Yoga or worked out fully its synthesis, one thing was certain, he was not prepared to carry on Sadhana only for individual salvation or for attaining supreme quiescence. As we have seen, he was constitutionally against any form of escapism. Therefore, even in his early days of Sadhana, the attempt was two-fold. While he tried to attain Samadhi (Swarupe Avasthānam), he endeavoured also to put himself entirely at the disposal of the Lord for any vigorous action necessary for the liberation of India. We shall revert to this aspect of his Yoga later in 1908.

The ineffable, intuitive as well unitive experience of the Supreme was the immediate goal of Aurobindo's Sadhana. He tried to fulfil the fundamental conditions of its attainment. He had already to his credit elevation of the moral life, absolute control of passion and desire, observance of Brahmacharya (continence as well as the practice of concentrating on Brahman), and he had made an all-out attempt to steady the mind by banishing all activity from it. He was also practising purification of the body and control of breath. His ultimate aim was the disassociation of the self from perception, sensation, thought, ideas, feeling and other modifications of the mind-stuff and its (self's) identification with the True Self which is the basis of all cognition. That is the Self-illuminated, Self-existent Supraconscious and Supracosmic Reality. He believed in all this and was convinced that this Reality should be pursued not only when there was frustration in the world of the senses, or disgust because of surfeit, but because it was a real hunger of the human soul. Reality in itself is intrinsically something magnificent and magnificently attractive. It was, he thought, in the basic nature of all human consciousness to evolve along this line. But for him, it was not the end of things

or the final goal of Yoga. He had already clear promptings that not only certain practices but every activity and all life could be Yoga. He had realised that to act as an instrument of the Divine was a spiritual status higher than the soul's merger or quiescence. That was why he thought his active political life could never conceivably come in the way of his spiritual Sadhana and his Yoga practices. When the call for political action came, he answered. It was a further opportunity for a new and more intense Sadhana.

The Upanishads speak of the supraconscious stage (Prajñāna) in which all ordinary experiences are transcended and there is one great, limitless, homogenous experience without duality. This is the stage of the non-conceptual intuition of the self where knower, knowledge, and known merge into one. It is a totality of simple and undifferentiated experience, the bedrock of all our ordinary consciousness and knowledge. It is at once the essence of our individual self and the highest principle of the universe, the Brahman, the Paratmātman. We may ask the question whether Aurobindo sought absorption as of a pinch of salt in water or of the rivers into the sea. The reply is that he emphasised the famous statement in the Mundaka Upanishad which says, he is greatest among the knowers of Brahman who sports with the Atman, who out of love, is one with the Atman and yet full of activity (Kriyāvān). It is obvious that the activity indicated is not always and necessarily physical. The eternal and ecstatic dance of Shiva, the Nataraja, Aurobindo said, is the true symbol of the cosmic activity of the Supreme Spirit. This is the secret of his extreme alertness and intense activity in whatever he did whether as professor at Baroda, or a political leader in India, or a prisoner in Alipore, or a Yogi in Pondicherry. He never looked upon these activities and Yoga as either inconsistent or separate. They were all one and of a piece to him and such as must lead

to the same goal, if performed in the proper spirit and with a full understanding of their basic harmony. Stemming as they do from one and the same Supraconsciousness, the Purushottam of the Gita, they have the same destination.

We can be certain that there were no separate compartments in Aurobindo's mind; his Sadhana proceeded at a rapid pace in spite of his outward activities. He indulged in the most exciting activity and yet continued his Sadhana every moment of his conscious life. When partial consummation came, we find him enjoying the infinite stillness of mind, side by side with every one of his activities, as if they were all directed by God. The second published letter to his wife, dated the 17th of February 1907 and written from 23, Scott's Lane, Calcutta, is from this point of view, of great importance. The translation of the original Bengali letter is as follows:—

“Dear Mrinalini,

“I did not write to you for long. This is a very old failing with me. What other remedy can I seek but pardon from you out of your natural goodness? Habits which have got firmly established cannot be overcome in a day. Possibly I may require my whole life to be free from this defect.

“There was a proposal that I should go over there on the 8th of January, but I could not do so. It was not of my own will that I did not go there. I had to go where Bhagawan led me. This time I did not go for my own work but I was in the midst of His work. This time the condition of my mind has completely altered. I do not wish to reveal all that in this letter. You come here. Then I shall tell you all that I wish to tell you. But just now, I would like to convey to you this much that hereafter, I am not master of myself. I shall have to go wherever Bhagawan leads me like a robot in his hands. I shall have to do what He commands like His bond-slave. I know that it may be

difficult for you to understand this language. But it is necessary for me to tell you the fact as it is. Otherwise, my movements would be objected to by you and they may cause pain and sorrow to you. You may misunderstand me and feel that I am neglecting you and going my own way. Kindly do not think so. So far, I have sinned against you very much. It was but natural that you were very much dissatisfied with my conduct. But now I have lost my freedom. Henceforward, you will have to take it that all I do is not dependent upon my volition but is entirely at the command of the Lord. When you come here, you will be able to understand fully what I am saying. I hope in the meanwhile, that the Lord, out of His infinite mercy, will bless you with the same light with which He has endowed me. But that entirely depends upon His abundant grace. If you wish intensely to follow me as my devoted wife, then you should engage yourself in whole-hearted efforts towards that end. He is sure to respond to your singlemindedness and show you the path out of compassion. You should not show this letter to anyone, as I have written to you about the innermost secret of my heart. To you alone have I revealed this matter and to none else. I am barred from communicating this to others. Sufficient unto the day.

Your beloved husband."

One cannot help recalling the famous exhortation of Shri Krishna to Arjuna on the field of battle when he said, "Be thou my instrument. I have done everything, I am doing all things, and in the fulness of time, I shall do what is necessary. Realize that you are but an instrument in my hands." This was Krishna's injunction to Arjuna when the latter became too egotistic and thought of himself too highly as the "doer" of things. Aurobindo being called by the Lord had surrendered himself completely. As a result,

his self stepped aside, allowing the Lord to be the main directive force. This in itself was a very high attainment. To surrender oneself on occasion, when for instance, one is faced with a momentous issue, or when one is at a loss to know what to do, is not very difficult nor uncommon. It happens in the case of many conscientious and God-fearing men and women. But to enthrone God in one's heart as a constant ruler and an unfailing guide and to eliminate the "I" altogether is a spiritual achievement of a very high order. It is tantamount to holding the self in suspended animation and allowing the Higher Self to take entire charge. In such circumstances the "I" continues because there is canalisation of conscious human energy in an individual, but it is only a silent witness to the fact that its house is run by a superior and a higher power!

In the Gita, Shri Krishna says that the whole universe is set in motion and is moving as if it were "Yantraroodha" (hitched on to a machine). Aurobindo found himself in that position when he wrote this letter to his wife. His Yoga was self-started and self-directed and his whole life was God-inspired. It continued to be so to the end. He once said when speaking about his writings in "Arya" and his literary *magnum opus* "Savitri", that it was not so much that he wrote them but that "they came", and he was only an instrument in recording them.

Another letter written to Mrinalini in December of the same year, reveals the continuance of the same process of Sadhana, though some irregularity in Pranayam is indicated. It shows that he was feeling the strain of his political activities. It was in Alipore jail that the next stage was reached, when he had "darshan" of Shri Krishna. Then he had the experience of seeing God face to face, and thus realizing his inmost ambition. Before we discuss this, however, let

us see what he says in the third published letter. The translation of the original Bengali runs thus:—

6th of December, 1907.

“Dear Mrinalini,

“.....Here I have not a moment to spare. I have so many responsibilities to discharge. I have to write for the papers, I have the heavy burden of the Congress organisational work, and I have to clear the entanglements regarding the “Bande Mataram” (the daily and weekly). I am so overburdened that I am not able to finish the work at all. On the top of it, I have ‘my own work’, which I can never neglect, much less abandon.

“Dear, dear, will you listen to me? I am now in a great fix. I am pulled in so many different directions that I am likely to go mad. If at such a juncture, you are not calm and collected in mind, my anxiety would increase and my grief would multiply. On the other hand, if you write to me with enthusiasm and in a soothing way, I shall derive special strength from you. I shall then be able to overcome all fear and adversity with a cheerful mind. I do know that your being lonely in Deoghar is a hardship to you. But your sorrow would not be able to overwhelm you, if you steady your mind and depend upon faith. Now that you have been married to me, some sorrow is inevitable. We are bound to live apart occasionally. The reason is quite plain. I cannot, like other common people, keep before myself the ideal of always doing what is necessary to make my family members and my relatives happy and content. Under these circumstances, the path of duty and Dharma that I have chosen is also yours. There is no other way for you but that of trying to derive happiness from the fulfilment which I may achieve in my appointed task. One word more. Most of the people with whom you are now staying are our elders. If they happen to speak something bitter,

or say something improper, I think you should bear with them and never get angry. Do not believe that what they say is from their heart or that they want to torment you purposely by speaking something thoughtless. Many a time, a bad word escapes the lips while in anger. You should not brood over such things. If you think that it is rather too hard for you to stay there, I shall write to Girish Babu and he will make arrangements till I am in the Congress....

Yours...."

This letter reveals the overwhelming nature of his God-ordained duties. At the same time, it is solicitous and tender regarding the feelings and the position of his helpless wife. His idea that the wife is Shakti and that he could derive immense strength from her if only she heartily shared his Dharma, persists and possibly continued to be with him till the end of his life. He pleads that separation and the other hardships to which she was being subjected were a natural and inevitable consequence of his highly dedicated life. His leaving Baroda, his forsaking a lucrative post for one on a pittance in the National College, his undertaking to write for various journals without remuneration, his night and day effort to build the nationalist party, were all done entirely at the bidding of the Lord. It was impossible for Mrinalini to understand but Aurobindo pleaded with her to try to sympathise with him and his work, and above all, to have faith in him and his Lord.

Then came the Surat Congress. But his inner calmness and equanimity were not disturbed. He went through the whole drama as if aware of what would happen. As we know, after the Surat split he visited a number of big towns. It was during this tour that he was confronted with a spiritual problem and Lele was summoned to Baroda from Gwalior. This meeting was a landmark in Aurobindo's spiritual Sadhana.

After listening to an account of his experiences and the course of action he had so far taken, Lele advised Aurobindo to make a supreme effort to empty his mind completely of all that could be called mind-stuff. After three days of effort Aurobindo had accomplished this task. The ego along with its mind-stuff had made an exit. Supreme calm then descended on him, reached the depths of his heart and established itself there. It was a calm which he had on occasion experienced before. Lele told him to be prepared to listen to a voice after the calm (Nishpanda-bhava) had been established. But none came. Aurobindo then journeyed to Poona and Bombay to answer the call of duty and took Lele with him. He had now realized the utter silence and infinite calm of the Supreme Brahman, beyond time and space. It was an experience in which the whole of creation seemed to be nowhere. It was a calm which seemed to be the sole Reality, all else was nothing! But it brought fresh difficulties. Neither Aurobindo nor Lele felt that Sadhana ended there. This was the experience of only one node of the total Reality. It was the experience of Being, and excluded the Becoming part of the Reality which is Being-Becoming taken as an integral whole. Aurobindo considered that after this experience and its part-realization, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to continue his duties. It was at this time that Lele, led by his own intuition, suggested a way by which Aurobindo could endeavour to surrender his whole Sadhana to the Inner Lord and obtain from Him his direction. His advice was that the best way in which his Sadhana could be continued was by obtaining internal direction from above. Aurobindo agreed to this. His complete dedication had already transformed him into an automaton of the Lord regarding his political activities. He was now to place himself entirely at His disposal regarding his Sadhana also. The Lord in the heart, was now to be the

Guru of Aurobindo. At last an extraordinary Shishya had secured an extraordinary Guru!

During his tour, Aurobindo complained to Lele that sometimes his mind went blank as he faced an audience. Lele gave him advice, which was followed and words proper to the occasion began to flow from a source above the mind. This resembles the experience of Vivekananda when years ago he had addressed the Parliament of Religions in Chicago. The whole of the ego-source dried up in Aurobindo and the higher fountain opened with gusto, showering ideas through him in an unceasing flow of appropriate phrase. His nationalism afterwards became much more spiritual and his politics still more pure.

This kind of experience is not exceptional or peculiar, but the speed with which Aurobindo attained it was truly amazing. An experience, so to say, of Shoonya, i.e., zero, is described in some books. It is hinted that one has to go beyond this state to know the whole truth. A complete and abiding stillness of one's consciousness is followed by the experience of total disappearance or absence of the concrete world. But this is only a negative experience. Reality is not a void, it is an existence, it is Being. It is described as Existence-Consciousness-Bliss. A few months later when he was within the four walls of Alipore jail, the positive experience of the unceasing immanence of the Supreme Spirit in everything came to him.

Aurobindo was always mindful of his debt to Lele and mentioned his name with respect. He once said that Lele had helped him, (a) to gain a very vivid and graphic experience of the still mind and absolutely calm Brahmic consciousness—vast, infinite and illimitable; (b) to acquire the power to speak and write without the use of the mind; and (c) to stick to the habit of submitting to the direction of the higher power above the mind. He writes, "It was

my great debt to Lele that he showed me this. 'Sit in meditation', he said, 'but do not think, look only at your mind; you will see thoughts coming into it; before they can enter throw these away from your mind till your mind is capable of entire silence'." All this happened before February 1908. When Barindra invited Lele to Calcutta in February 1908, the intention was to request his help in the spiritual training of the revolutionary youth of Bengal. For some days Lele stayed in Calcutta in Seal's lodge. In the course of their talks, it transpired that Lele was apprehensive that the voice Aurobindo was following was Asuric (demoniac) in nature. This referred to revolutionary activities, which Aurobindo later abandoned. He added that it would be difficult for him to undertake further responsibility in Aurobindo's Sadhana if he continued to follow that voice. Aurobindo immediately absolved Lele from his responsibility and fell back entirely on his own inner guidance. Thus ended one of the most delicate relationships ever developed between two souls in the course of Sadhana. (P. 254, "Dakshina", August 1951).

When asked later in (1938) if Lele had realisation, Aurobindo said, "Of course, but I saw that he had ambition and ego". Here are some important observations regarding Lele and himself in his letter to Dilip: "After four years of Pranayam and other practices on my own, with no other result than an increased health and energy, some psychophysical phenomena, a great outflow of poetic creation, a limited power of subtle sight (luminous patterns and figures etc.) mostly with the waking eye, I had a complete arrest and was at a loss. At this juncture I was induced to meet a man without fame whom I did not know, a Bhakta with a limited mind but with some experience and evocative power. We sat together and I followed with an absolute fidelity what he instructed me to do, not myself in the least under-

standing where he was leading me or where I was myself going. The first result was a series of tremendously powerful experiences and radical changes of consciousness which he had never intended—for they were Advaitic and Vedantic and he was against Advaita Vedanta—and which were quite contrary to my own ideas, for they made me see with a stupendous intensity the world as a cinematographic play of vacant forms in the impersonal universality of the Absolute Brahman. The final upshot was that he was bade by a Voice within him to hand me over to the Divine within me enjoining an absolute surrender to its will—a principle or rather a seed-force to which I kept unswervingly and increasingly till it led me through all the mazes of an incalculable Yogic development bound by no single rule or style or dogma or Shastra to where and what I am now and towards what shall be hereafter. Yet he understood so little what he was doing that when he met me a month or two later, he was alarmed, tried to undo what he had done and told me that it was not the Divine but the Devil that had got hold of me.”

We know that Aurobindo had been feeling the strain of his activities. Relief came in a strange way. Events so conspired that he was arrested in May 1908 and sent to Alipore jail. He spent about a year there. It was not a bed of roses, no jail can be. He had to undergo all possible hardships and the worst hardship for him at that time was the necessity to live in a crowd for months on end. But he faced things as always, with remarkable equanimity. What is more, he made his jail-life an opportunity for further unbroken Sadhana.

He welcomed this ordeal. It was to be a period of rest from the world and also an occasion when he could live in seclusion. When for some time, he was forced to live in a dormitory with a number of other people, he trained his mind to meditate in the midst of all diversions. He closed

his mind to the case and was nonchalant. He felt that he would not be found guilty. To all other hardships and to creature comforts he was absolutely indifferent. Thus by sheer force of will and through an intense desire to continue his Sadhana without break, he created even in that dreary place an atmosphere congenial to his work. In his case "the mind was its own place and it could make a heaven of hell". With this initial preparation, his Sadhana went on and we know the result. He has described the consummation in his Uttarapara speech delivered after his release. It is a glowing account of the glorious vision of Shri Krishna pervading everything, from each atom of the cosmic dust to the newest star, from the first protein molecule which started life to the newest babe born on earth. It was obviously the realization of the cosmic consciousness, of the Divine, immanent and transcendent. It can be summed up in the pregnant phrase of the Gita, "Vasudevah Sarvam" (all is Vasudeva). It was no longer the unutterable stillness of spaceless and timeless Brahman, nor the mere dance of dynamic creation but it was both in One, the all-pervasive Purushottam, in Whom all meet and find their meaning and synthesis. He had also glimpses of the power higher than the mind which is the link between our consciousness and the Consciousness of the Divine. But more of this later. We must restrict ourselves here to discussing his vision of the immanent Divine while in Alipore jail.

Aurobindo himself calls this period of incarceration as "Ashramvās", life in a hermitage. "Its only result was that I found God", he says in his small book, "Kārā Kāhini", the story of his prison life. (It is written in Bengali, and is an interesting document). But this particular Sadhana in jail is important and also its fulfilment. For a while, he says, he was shaken in faith, as he considered his imprisonment an uncalled for interference in God's work. But after

three days, a voice came to him and said, "Wait and see". He then remembered that he had neglected to answer the call to seclusion that had come to him a month earlier. This was a sequel to his disobedience! Even in God's government the penalty for civil disobedience, it appears, is jail! He was allowed to have the Gita and the Upanishads. They were his constant companions. In one of his speeches which refers to this period ("Speeches and Writings", p. 90) he says, "His (Lord Krishna) strength entered into me and I was able to do the Sadhana of the Gita". In another speech he describes his experience ("Speeches and Writings", pp. 92-93) thus:

"I looked at the jail that secluded me from men and it was no longer by its high walls that I was imprisoned; no, it was Vasudeva who surrounded me. I walked under the branches of the tree in front of my cell, but it was not the tree, I knew it was Vasudeva, it was Sri Krishna whom I saw standing there and holding over me His shade. I looked at the bars of my cell, the very grating that did duty for a door, and again I saw Vasudeva. It was Narayana who was guarding and standing sentry over me. As I lay on the coarse blankets that were given me for a couch, I felt the arms of Sri Krishna around me, the arms of my Friend and Lover. This was the first use of the deeper vision He gave me. I looked at the prisoners in jail, the thieves, the murderers, the swindlers, and as I looked at them, I saw Vasudeva, it was Narayana whom I found in those darkened souls and misused bodies."

He writes in his account of jail-life, "... Day after day He showed me His wonders and made me realize the utter truth of the Hindu Religion. I had many doubts before. I was brought up in England amongst foreign ideas and an atmosphere entirely alien.... But now, day after day, I realized in the body the truths of the Hindu religion. They became living experiences to me, and such things were

opened to me which no material science could explain". He fully realized that in addition to personal effort, the grace of God is an important element in fulfilment. Even the Upanishads refer to this kind of grace, "Yamevaisha Vranute Tena Labhyah". It is he who is chosen, gets to know the Reality.

One or two small but important incidents while in Alipore jail should be mentioned here, since they bear directly on Aurobindo's Sadhana. Upendra, a co-prisoner, once inquired of him where he obtained the oil for his hair. It was so dark and shiny that Upendra was sure Aurobindo was receiving oil from somewhere! But the shine was the result and effect of his Yogic practises. Another incident refers to the experience of levitation. Once, during meditation in his cell, he found himself in a very peculiar poise. One point of one knee touched the ground and the whole body balanced on it. It was a position which could not be taken voluntarily, however hard one tried. It was only when one of the watchmen discovered him in that pose and went to report the happening to the officers that Aurobindo realized what was happening! By the time the officer arrived, however, Aurobindo was in a normal position once more and to all the enquiries he responded by a simple laugh.

The important change in his outlook and the deeper note of spirituality after his release from jail, is clearly noticeable in the following lines of his Uttarpara speech: "I spoke once before that this movement is not a political movement and that nationalism is not politics but religion, a creed, a faith. I say it again today, but I put it another way. I say no longer that nationalism is a creed, a religion, a faith; I say that it is Sanatana Dharma which for us is nationalism."

The effect of his vision was profound and abiding. It reflected in his writings and speeches and attitude. It conti-

nued until the day of his departure for Chandernagore and Pondicherry.

The next period lasting about a year, covered activities similar to those of previous years but there was now a difference. "Yoga is skill in works" was the motto of his new journal "Karmayogin". And what is Karmayoga but "the application of Vedanta and Yoga to life?" At another time he said, "Yoga is communion with God for knowledge, for love, for work". He now began to urge the whole nation to go into Sadhana in order to revitalize the cultural heritage of India. His emphasis on Brahmacharya and Yoga as the twin means of reaching perfection shows what importance he attached to them in Sadhana. His belief in spirituality had become firmer. He wrote, "it is the Spirit alone that saves".

But he was destined soon to leave the active arena of politics for a more intensely active inner field of the mind, and the planes above it. The basis from which he had been working now proved to be inadequate and he ventured into a struggle to scale new heights and to find fresh foundation for a "life divine" on earth.



CHAPTER X

TOWARDS SUPERMIND

THE next phase of Aurobindo's Sadhana opens first, for a brief period of a month and a half, in Chandernagore and then moves to Pondicherry, both of which were then French outposts in India. It was now more than evident that the Government of India was going to pursue him however fruitlessly, in an attempt to see that he was out of their way. They failed once, twice, thrice and four times! It now trans-

pired that the inner call to exclusively pursue the path of contemplative Yoga became very persistent in Aurobindo's mind and he left for Chandernagore and afterwards for Pondicherry, almost as a helpless automaton of.

He did not go with any predetermination never to return to active politics. On the contrary, in reply to an invitation from Chittaranjan Das, he wrote, "Dear Chitta, I would not enter the world of action with my older ideas and inspirations. I am in search of a higher goal. When I reach that, I will begin my work with my base there". It is clear then, that he intended to seek a higher base in spirituality before returning to other activities. Exclusive devotion to inner development was the main feature of his earlier Sadhana in Pondicherry. The same urge that had led him to Yoga, to the doctrine of complete self-surrender, to the simultaneous practice of Pranayam, of contemplation, and of Nishkam Karma, now urged him to go beyond the mind and try to possess the supramental. He had started his spiritual Sadhana with the intention of obtaining more Brahmatej, more Sattvic moral power and strength for the emancipation of India. That led him to Yoga. He could still the mind, suspend outward activity of the self and look to the inner Spirit as its real abode. He had also surrendered himself completely to the Lord, to the extent of feeling that he moved only at His word. No doubt, he could have rested here as so many had done before. But this would not have meant any advance for humanity beyond the ground already covered. Aurobindo felt that his mission was different. His aim now was to realize the Supermind, to take his stand in the Truth-Consciousness which is the natural and normal poise of the Supermind and then to bring down the Supermind to matter, life and mind in order to transform them into finer instruments of divine action on earth. This alone would lead to the birth of a future humanity which

would inherit truth-vision, harmony in spirit and action, and ineffable joy.

To judge by ordinary standards, vast ground had already been covered by him. But now that he had launched on a far greater adventure, previous achievements seemed to be insignificant and fragmentary. Each stage through which he had passed might well have occupied the lifetime of even a good Yogi. Most would be satisfied to have attained one stage and would feel "Kritartha", that is one who has attained one's aim in life. But with Aurobindo, individual solution or salvation was never the aim even in the initial stages of his quest. He was like a poet who would not be satisfied until he had written a mighty epic of the human spirit. He was like a painter who would take the sky as his canvas and the rainbow as his inkpot. He was like an architect who would start building a temple where the gods of humanity would dwell. And yet at the beginning all seemed so simple. The curtain rises on a human soul struggling to find the truth. But as the drama develops, we see an epic hero battling and grappling with forces, inner and outer, with a view to clearing the way for humanity. In essence, his attempt was to cut a clear path of victory and triumph over matter, life, and mind for generations yet unborn.

An extract from his Uttarpada speech reads as follows:

"When I approached God at that time, I hardly had a living faith in Him. The agnostic was in me, the atheist was in me, the sceptic was in me and I was not absolutely sure that there was a God at all. I did not feel His presence. Yet something drew me to the truth of the Vedas, the truth of the Gita, the truth of the Hindu religion. I felt there must be a mighty truth somewhere in this Yoga, a mighty truth in this religion based on the Vedanta."

His object, though limited at that time, was highly altruistic and not at all personal. In the same speech he

remarked, "I do not ask for anything that others ask for. I ask only for strength to uplift this nation, I ask only to be allowed to live and work for this people whom I love and to whom, I pray, that I may devote my life."

His struggles were as intense as they were titanic. In one of his letters to Dilip ("Aurobindo came to me") he writes:

"But what strange ideas again! that I was born with a supramental temperament and that I know nothing of hard realities! Good God! My whole life has been a struggle with hard realities—from hardships, starvation in England and constant dangers and fierce difficulties to the far greater difficulties constantly cropping up here in Pondicherry, external and internal. My life has been a battle: the fact that I wage it now from a room upstairs and by spiritual means as well as others that are external, makes no difference to its character. But of course, as we have not been shouting these things, it is natural, I suppose, for others to think that I am living in an august, glamorous, lotus-eating dream-land where no hard facts of life or nature present themselves. But what an illusion all the same!"

From his letter to Chittaranjan, we saw that his whole former basis of working had, as it were, become out-of-date from his point of view. And now he wanted to work not from the mental but from the supramental plane. Not with the mind, the fumbling, stumbling, erring instrument that humanity possesses today but with that unerring and directly cognitive instrument, the supermind, with which the Divine itself works. His intent and purpose was to change the fundamental nature of humanity. The whole meaning and essence of his Pondicherry Sadhana was in this great endeavour.

Aurobindo's faith in Yoga and its capacity was as profound as his faith in the Divine itself. It was that faith, together with confirmation through his experiences, which

led him on from stage to stage. In his "Tirthankar", Dilip gives an account of an interview with Aurobindo in which he is purported to have said: "I too wanted at one time to transform through my Yoga the face of the world. I had wanted to change the fundamental nature and movements of humanity, to exile all the evils which affect mortals It was with this aim and outlook that I turned to Yoga in the beginning and I came to Pondicherry because I had been directed by the Voice to pursue my Yoga here". It is of incidental interest to know that hundreds of years ago Pondicherry was called Veda-puri and the great Agasthya Rishi lived there as its patron-saint.

During the first four years of his life in Pondicherry, Aurobindo worked out his synthesis of Yoga and perfected the technique which has come to be known as Purna Yoga or Integral Yoga. Here we find a total view of things and a grand reconciliation of apparent opposites. In discovering an underlying inner harmony within himself and by evolving an integral personality by his strenuous Sadhana, Aurobindo found the key to the harmony and the music of the spheres and to the supreme personality, the Purushottam, the presiding Divinity over the seemingly conflicting dualities in the cosmos.

He knew, however, that individual realization even of the Supermind was not enough to change the whole of humanity at once. Humanity had to be ripe for an all-out effort. But meanwhile, he thought that individuals and groups could carry on the Sadhana. Dilip quotes Aurobindo in his "Tirthankar" as saying, "It was then (i.e., after my own Atma-siddhi) that my outlook changed with the knowledge born of my new Yogic consciousness. But then I found, to my utter disillusionment, that it was only my ignorance which had led me to think that the impossible was feasible here and now in order to help humanity out, it was

not enough for an individual, however great, to achieve an ultimate solution individually; humanity has to be ripe for it too."

There cannot be any doubt that the four years of seeming silence were pregnant with intense Sadhana. For, after this time, there came from him the most eloquent, forceful, fruitful and varied writing which has since proved to be a permanent contribution to world literature on philosophy, poetry, culture, sociology and spiritual technique. His writings in "Arya" are not laboured or artificial. They are an expression of much of the inner knowledge accumulated during his Yoga practices. He writes in "Arya", "The spiritual experience and the general truths on which such an attempt can be based were already present to us, otherwise we should have no right to make the endeavour at all; but the complete intellectual statement of them....had to be found."

Then "Arya" continued to be published for six and a half years. His writings in it were a continuation of his Sadhana in the intellectual field. The relation his political activities had borne to his spiritual Sadhana during 1906-10, was replaced now in 1914-1921 by his intellectual activities. But the field and the plane on which he worked were now different. The field was that of ideas and of thought and the plane was entirely spiritual.

The reader will be wondering what kind of Sadhana and for what purpose Aurobindo continued until the end of his life, when, to all intents and purposes, in the eyes of the general public, and within the knowledge of those who were intimate with him, he had attained the usual Siddhi. Suffice it to say that he was a Siddha in the orthodox sense, but in relation to his goal of bringing down the Supramental, he continued to be a Sadhak. There is nothing inconsistent

in this. Even after he went to Pondicherry, there was no stop or respite in his Sadhana. Whether he was in silence, editing "Arya", writing to disciples, conducting an Ashram, or composing "Savitri", it went on as intensely as ever. The difference was that now he sought a far higher prize in order to effect a more revolutionary change, namely the transformation of humanity into a divinized community.

He had already reached what is usually called Atma-Siddhi. But Aurobindo, as a fully evolved soul, as one who was a Siddha and as one who had nothing more to achieve for himself, had chosen to make an experiment in the way of consciously trying to help nature expedite the next evolutionary leap that humanity was bound to take. His vision of future humanity was quite clear. He had sighted the Supermind, that is, Truth-Consciousness, the instrumentality through which the Divine acts on the lower planes of consciousness, including the inconscient. He said that the coming of the Superman was as sure now as was the coming of man before he actually came. This leap from the mind to the supermind was as certain as the leap from life to mind. Man would then be transformed because he would no longer be acting in ignorance and through it, but in knowledge and therefore in light, in love, in harmony, and in Anand. Aurobindo saw the possibility, at the next stage of humanity, of the supermind purifying and divinizing the whole content of man, his material, vital and mental being. His Sadhana consisted therefore, in hastening that process in himself and in those that followed him with faith.

It was obvious to Aurobindo that the next stage in human evolution was to be reached not by a mere turning of the magic wand or by a Mantra or a miracle. It was a process. What could be done by one who had had a vision of it was to proclaim the vision in clear terms, to stand witness to the truth of the vision, to give a call to humanity

to prepare itself, and finally, to help all souls to respond to the extent that each was capable. Thus he would participate in the evolutionary process that was here and now going on. This almost superhuman effort to usher in the era of supermen on earth primarily took the form of an intensely searching probe into the higher regions and the upper reaches of consciousness. This was a part of the attempt to bring the power of the Supermind to bear on the matter, life, and mind of humanity. It was an intense search for a more complete experience which would help unite and harmonise the dyad of the Reality, namely Spirit and Matter, Purusha and Prakriti, Being and Becoming, through the agency of the supermind. Some other ways in which he carried on the work included taking charge of the Sadhana of those that believed in him and had faith in the truth he had discovered, advising them and writing to them, writing and revising books already written, composing the grand epic "Savitri", and giving exclusive devotion to spiritual exercise. This indeed, was the Sadhana that Aurobindo followed till the last moment of his earthly life.

It is interesting to know some of the outward and visible things about him which attracted notice while he carried on his Sadhana during the long years in Pondicherry. We know already the way in which he lived whole in Baroda and Calcutta. We must now see, very briefly, under what conditions and in what environment he conducted his spiritual adventure at this time.

His moving to French India proved to be extremely wise. The suspicious government of the day would otherwise have been on his track. If nothing else, that would have been a nuisance. Moreover, any action the government might or might not have taken would have acted as an artificial restriction on the movements of many who wished to visit him and stay with him. All that was avoided by his

residing in Pondicherry. His habits as regards food, clothing, sleep, shelter and other creature comforts were always a model of simplicity. He was in fact, indifferent to these things. He never had been a lover of physical exercise. His general health was good and for a time in Baroda he practised the ordinary Indian Danda and Baithak exercises. Later, walking on the terrace or in his rooms comprised the only exercise he allowed himself. Sleep or physical and mental rest were entirely within his control and depended upon his particular requirements.

He laid the greatest possible stress on Brahmacharya, not only in the highest sense of the term but also in the widest sense. During his political career, he had lived with his wife and sister for a very brief period in Calcutta, but after his departure to Pondicherry, he gave to Mrinalini neither chance nor permission to see him till the year 1918. When this permission was granted, however, and while on her way to Pondicherry in December of that year, the poor brave and loving woman succumbed to influenza in Calcutta. In one of his letters, he says that not only sex-life but also sex-thoughts, if allowed to have their way, obstruct the course of Sadhana. Sex-energy and life-energy being the same, the sex-act does diminish it to some extent.

Brahmacharya, however, does not mean only continence or chastity or physical abstinence from the sex-act. The continence that Brahmacharya contemplates extends to abstinence from thinking and talking about sex. Sex apart, Brahmacharya lays down that the Sadhak must abstain from everything that comes in the way of the contemplation of Brahman. This is only the negative side of Brahmacharya. The positive side is to keep the mind busy and occupied with thoughts about Brahman, the highest truth. Keeping our mind occupied with Brahman consists in listening to what is said about it, thinking about it, understanding it and contemplat-

ing about it constantly. One who rigorously practises Brahmacharya and all that it implies, develops Tejas as well as Ojas, physical as well as intellectual and moral brilliance and power. Brahmatejas is the power that develops as a result of the observance of Brahmacharya in the fullest sense. On account of Brahmacharya, Aurobindo's physical body developed an extraordinary golden shine in later years.

The story of his contact with the outside world, is to say the least, very peculiar and extraordinary. The first four years in Pondicherry were spent in living a very secluded life and are usually termed the "silent years". Then came the "Arya" period when he developed contacts enough for running the great journal. After this, his contact for years, even with his closest disciples, was only through the Mother. After 1926, he receded even further into seclusion. From 1930-38, however, there was such an abundance of contact, but only through correspondence, that he was sometimes required to work until 5 in the morning. When he ended the correspondence method, the only link left between him and the world, including his disciples, was the Mother. It was in 1927, that the Darshan system was organised. Four days in a year were set aside and on those days disciples in the Ashram as well as those who came specially for Darshan filed past Aurobindo and the Mother in silence, as they both sat on specially prepared Asans (seats). People had to be satisfied with it. Sometimes, as on 15th August 1947, the number swelled to 2000. This method of occasion Darshan continued to the end of his life. The last of it was on the 24th of November 1950.

Coupled with Aurobindo's deliberate seclusion, these facts are likely to give one an impression that he was remote from the world and that he had ceased to have human and humane considerations. This would be a very mistaken conception of his approach and attitude. In fact, the more re-

mote he was from physical contact, the nearer he was to all who were near and dear to his heart. Humanity itself, however, was nearest to him, and his Sadhana was meant for humanity. He has emphasised this point many times. And that is evident in the numerous letters he has written, in their rich emotional content, their courtesy, their humility and the affection which pervades most of them. Nor was he a stranger to humour. It is sometimes obvious in his letters, but it was enjoyed much more by those who had the occasional privilege of being with him. There was a strong trait of shyness and reserve in his temperament. It is also true that he avoided being in crowds, which is one of the characteristics of true knowledge and is one of the important disciplines prescribed by Yogic Sadhana. His studied isolation and seclusion was dictated more by the necessity of Sadhana than by any other consideration. His heart was too tender, his sense of human brotherhood too strong, his identity with the aspirations and destiny of humanity too thick to admit of any feeling of separateness or remoteness, either from those near him or from general humanity.

The reader is likely to have another wrong impression from the seclusion in which he shrouded himself: that Aurobindo had lost touch with the world of human affairs, with the mighty events and happenings outside the Ashram, and with scientific discoveries that were fast making man the master of the material world. His writings and letters however, bear witness to the fact that even to the last moment, he did not miss anything of importance. His philosophy strikes us not as one which is out-of-date but as one which has taken into consideration the latest thought and the last discovery. His philosophy as well as his Yoga are nothing if they are not integral, coordinated, synthetic, constructive and in line with the evolutionary trends of Nature. His